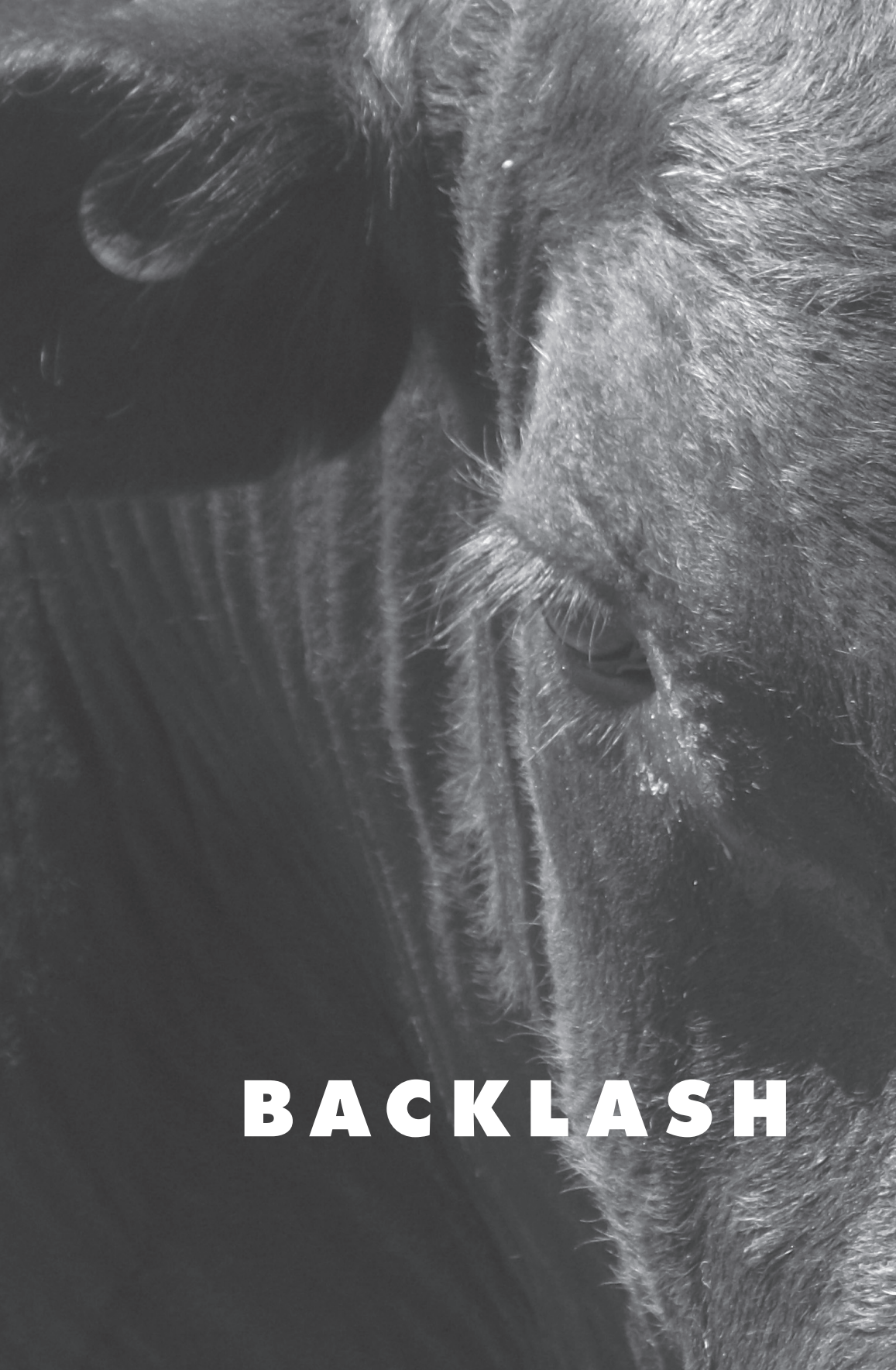


BACKLASH



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AUSTRALIA'S CONFLICT OF VALUES OVER LIVE EXPORTS

BIDDA JONES & JULIAN DAVIES

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Finlay Lloyd Publishers
81 Lascelles Street
Braidwood NSW 2622 Australia
finlaylloyd@sharewater.net
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About the authors

Bidda Jones, who trained as a zoologist, has devoted her working life to improving the welfare of animals. She leads the science and policy team at RSPCA Australia and has been campaigning against the live export trade for nearly two decades. Originally from the Isle of Man, Bidda moved to Australia in 1996.

Julian Davies is a writer with a keen interest in public policy. His collaboration on this book came after closely observing the politics of live animal exports and discussing the issue with Bidda for many years.

Bidda and Julian live with their family in the mountains near Braidwood, New South Wales.

The contents of this book represent the views of the authors and are independent from those of any organisation, including RSPCA Australia.

TO KNOW MY DEED,
'TWERE BEST NOT KNOW MYSELF.

Shakespeare

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I. INTRODUCTION

Almost five years have passed since the ABC *Four Corners* program, *A Bloody Business*, went to air on the 30th of May 2011, shocking the Australian public with its graphic account of the plight of Australian cattle slaughtered in Indonesia. The spur for us to write this book grew initially from a talk Bidda gave one evening a year or so later. The talk attempted to bring to life her involvement in the events that led to the making of the *Four Corners* program and the campaign to stop the live export trade hinged around it. Julian went along on the trip—the unlikely setting was Bermagui, a small town on the south coast of New South Wales—and the extent to which this particular and eclectic audience had been engaged by the issue became the focus of a long conversation between us on the return drive the next day. The evening’s interaction galvanised our view that the story behind the public reaction against the ethical failure of this industry demanded to be told. At that stage we did not envisage the full impact of the subsequent political backlash against the campaign although it was, in turn, already gathering momentum. As we began to write, our task shifted and grew to encompass the growing reaction to the campaign and the complex backstory of the industry. Even more recently, our growing perspective on these events and their history, combined with alarm over the recent expansion of the trade, has made the undertaking seem an increasing imperative. For everyone involved—government, producers, the public, animal welfare advocates and, most importantly, the animals themselves—more is at stake than seemed possible five years ago.

Should Australia export living animals for slaughter? This is the question at the heart of this book. While our motivation for writing it stems from the conviction that live exports should stop—we have attempted to reveal the full extent of the evidence against the trade—the question remains a real one for public policy and the Australian people. We hope our book will contribute to this policy debate. With this aim, we have closely examined how far the issue really involves a simple opposition of two cases: one justifying the trade on economic terms and one damning

it on animal welfare terms. In the process we ask further questions. How should our society evaluate the relative weight we give economics and ethics? And, stepping beyond the most predictable preconceptions, is there an ethical case for the trade and an economic one against it? The export industry, for instance, now argues that it is a positive agent for change, helping to improve animal welfare in the countries where it sends animals. The welfare movement, in turn, argues that meat exports can fully replace the live trade with long-term economic benefits for all but a small minority of producers. How does each of these views stand up to scrutiny?

What follows is not an academic examination of what comprises effective social movement campaigning; it's not a scientific account of inhumane slaughter; and, of course, it cannot be an unbiased examination of the different sides of the live export debate. Nonetheless, we want to make clear that while decisively arguing the animal welfare case, ours is not an inflexible ideological position. The complexity of this issue is perhaps typical of the conflict between different stakeholder groups in a pluralistic society. Certainly, we present evidence that the extent of industry and government failure in managing the trade creates a cogent argument for its end. But, going beyond that, we examine how the interests of farmers are really best served. The model that has existed has been a reactive one—where an export opportunity appears it has been taken without long-term planning, and with seriously inadequate attention to the welfare of the animals involved, or for the collateral damage to Australia's reputation as a farming nation. In a real sense, this book is about the best way for Australia to pursue its economic interests.

Throughout the book, *A Bloody Business* remains the focal point which frames both the history of the trade and the movement against it. Although ratings showed that the audience for the program was small, even for ABC current affairs, the chain reaction that developed in the following days and months was almost unprecedented in Australian public discourse. Our elected representatives were deluged with emails, letters and phone calls. One long-seasoned senator commented that he had never seen a response like this to any issue in over 30 years in

parliament. Following that climactic time, much has been written about the program, the joint campaign by Animals Australia and RSPCA Australia that followed, and the Gillard government's decision to (temporarily) suspend the live export trade to Indonesia.

Today it may seem difficult to believe any of this happened. The Abbott government turned its back so decisively on those events and on public outrage over our export of living animals for slaughter, it can almost seem the extent of that outrage was somehow an invention of animal welfare organisations and the press—unless the government's actions are seen as a consistent reaction against the 2011 suspension. For, of course, the backlash to that decision was intense. While many cattle producers were horrified by the cruel treatment of Australian cattle under conditions supported by their own industry bodies, there was increasing anger in rural Australia over the loss of the Indonesian market. The government used this anger to support its case that Australia had an economic emergency that required us to grasp every export opportunity (an emergency it subsequently downplayed). The reshaping of the Coalition government under Malcolm Turnbull has not extended to re-evaluating live exports. Even some in the Labor opposition, the party which in government suspended the trade, have shifted to apologising for the decision. This backtracking may have come largely from a fear of being wedged on the issue, but it indicates how successful the backlash has been.

Of course, it was inevitable that, from such a high point, media interest in the controversy would wane. It was as though the intensity of that time wore out the issue or, at least, tolerance for it among journalists and commentators. To some extent, the public has been worn down too, not just by compassion fatigue but by the sea of backlash misinformation. One of the most common myths peddled is that our animals are only so cruelly treated because of the requirements of halal slaughter, as though that also somehow excused the trade. Not only did the cruelty revealed in *A Bloody Business* have absolutely nothing to do with religion, but most Muslim countries import meat from Australia that comes from animals that were humanely stunned.

Misinformation and fatigue aside, a more fundamental change than this has taken place. When fresh video evidence emerges of cruelty to animals in our export markets (as it does with disturbing frequency) it cannot be completely ignored, but there is a clear shift in emphasis, as though an exaggerated paradigm of financial realism now overrides ethical concerns. When Indonesia changes its import quotas, or when cattle producers in the north assert there is new evidence that their businesses are on a knife-edge, or when a new market is explored by the federal Minister for Agriculture, this paradigm and the political values that inform it are clearly evident.

In September 2013 on his first overseas visit to Jakarta, newly elected Prime Minister Tony Abbott made the comment that the previous government had panicked in the face of a television program and *nothing like this can ever be allowed to happen again*. He repeated this assertion a number of times, upping the rhetoric as recently as May 2015, to refer to the ban as *a catastrophic decision*. There have also been many attempts to discredit the ABC for broadcasting *A Bloody Business*, from politicians asserting that the evidence shown in the program was fabricated or doctored, to newspaper editorials about the program undermining the national good by damaging our trade. The messenger has been shot as though the decision to present damning evidence was, by its very nature, wrong. Such views only underline the intensity of the political dimensions of an issue that goes beyond politics to the heart of who we are as a people. While the economic survival of our cattle farmers is a real and pressing consideration, the public reacted to institutionalised cruelty in the live export trade, and this response, whether emotionally reactive or ethically thoughtful, will not go away.

However jaded public interest may seem to have become since the early intense days of the campaign, many federal politicians consistently report in discussions with the RSPCA that they get more correspondence about animal welfare than any other single issue, with concern about the cruelty of live exports being very clearly the main focus. It may be true that the majority of these voters live in urban electorates—an unfortunate indication of the divide between the concerns, if not the

values, of country and city Australians—but it is a clear indication of the pressure for change in our centres of population. It is also important to recognise that farmers can care a great deal about their animals even though their livelihoods are dependent on raising and selling them. It will be a central premise of this book that a well-governed society develops ways to reconcile economics and welfare so that both suffer as little as possible.

Concern about the cruel treatment of animals may wax and wane as information is revealed through the media, as we tire of exposure to horrible images or rise up again in anger over them, or our terms of trade tempt us to minimise ethical issues, but it seems clear that animal agriculture will never again be allowed to be about trade alone. The public expects a clear duty of care to the livestock we grow for profit. The outcome of such expectations remains in doubt, and over time will define the sort of society we choose to create.

It is sometimes argued that our own problems, the injustices and issues that beset humans, should far outweigh concerns for animal welfare. We have heard it said that all the fuss in 2011 was just about cattle. It is strange that we should find it hard to hold a number of imperatives in our minds at once. Mahatma Gandhi may not be an icon of Australian political discourse but he defined something fundamental when he said: *The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.* Indeed, there is much evidence that cruelty to animals is associated with cruelty to people. Understanding that animals can suffer and learning how to avoid this, to organise commerce so it entrenches compassion towards animals, may only be a part of a pathway to a better society overall, but it is a clear and vital part. We have a responsibility to act in the face of a moral wrong.

The question of whether we should exploit animals at all is a vexed one, complicated by environmental issues as well as ones of welfare. This book will not attempt to address the debate about animal production and climate change because, no matter how prominent that issue might become, it is secondary to the welfare of the millions of animals that continue to be exported every year from our shores. Similarly, it will not

examine calls for the end of human use of animals. Such a renunciation of exploitation is argued for passionately by a small minority of the population. Even though a growing number of Australians are questioning the way in which their food is produced, we live in a society where the vast majority of people regularly eat meat and are likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, we have an unavoidable responsibility to ensure that the animals we raise for food are humanely farmed, transported and slaughtered. Like it or not, a continuing stream of animals is going to be grown for food and it is essential that every one of them suffers as little as possible. When shown indisputable evidence of cruelty to animals, and particularly the sort of appalling cruelty witnessed in Indonesia, and we are in a position to take action, then that is what we should do. We also have a clear responsibility to carefully examine the characteristics of our own nation in an attempt to understand how our animal husbandry practices have formed and whether they have distorted or retarded welfare standards.

Events have marched on since May 2011. It already seems long ago that, at the beginning of 2013, Prime Minister Julia Gillard met in Darwin with the Indonesian government as part of an annual conversation about the relationship between the two countries. The extent to which this relationship was damaged by the events of 2011 was then still a hot question. Following the 2013 election, one of the Abbott government's political imperatives was the control of asylum seekers, and it was keen to placate the Indonesians over live cattle imports, partly to retain cooperation over stopping people smuggling, partly to appease the rural element of its own constituency. Only compounding diplomatic tension, reported Australian phone tapping of President Yudhoyono and his inner circle caused unequivocal damage to the relationship. In this context, on that first trip to Indonesia, Abbott also commented that conditions in Indonesian abattoirs were as good as Australian ones. In the face of such a statement, and such diplomatic and political pressure, it was unlikely that political discussion at the time referred seriously to anything resembling animal welfare.

Meanwhile, cruelty to Australian animals exported overseas has

continued and has come to light with distressing regularity, leaking out like a guilty conscience constrained to bursting point. When Bidda mentioned to a colleague working in Indonesia how Abbott had equated our abattoirs with Indonesia's, he immediately sent her a phone shot of slaughtermen standing knee-deep in the carcasses of steers butchered on the killing room floor. Had Abbott actually walked into a randomly selected Jakarta abattoir, he could only have been shocked by the lack of hygiene, let alone the way animals were being killed. Two years on, in October 2015, Barnaby Joyce as Minister for Agriculture visited Indonesia to spruik the live trade. At the same time reports were again emerging of the breakdown of export controls in the Middle East where thousands of Australian sheep were enduring backyard slaughter in appalling conditions.

The footage shown in *A Bloody Business* remains, out of so much other evidence, the most incriminating documentation of the failings of the trade. The program had to show the reality of the treatment of those animals. That the treatment was so hard to watch is indicative of just how intolerable the situation was. At the time Bidda and her colleagues hoped making Australians aware would make a difference. But they had no idea quite how significant the program would be, and what a response it would cause. On the night it was broadcast, the program may have had a small audience, but it then had what was perhaps the biggest impact of any *Four Corners* program that has gone to air. It was also one of the lowest rating programs ever to win a Gold Walkley award for excellence in journalism—but what has not yet been properly discussed or revealed is the whole story behind the program: how it came to be, why it came to be, what it has meant to the animal welfare movement in Australia, and the complex and fraught background story of an industry that even now only amounts to twelve per cent of the value of our combined meat and animal export trade. This book tells that story—or, at least, our carefully considered view of it. And it examines the complex aftermath of the public outcry and the governmental response that continues to unfold.

Throughout the book we have named people whenever their

involvement or comments are public knowledge, and have kept the confidence of some others where it would be damaging for them not to. We have been as frank as possible, given these events and their ongoing impacts and ramifications. Many people who understand the trade and the issues that surround it, who are involved in the battle over it and who have worked in it, have helped with advice and comments.

It was only because of the revelatory footage taken courageously by Lyn White and her co-investigator that the *Four Corners* program could happen, and because of the outstanding journalism of Sarah Ferguson and Michael Doyle that it had the impact it did. But without the dedicated work of all Bidda's colleagues at Animals Australia and RSPCA Australia the reality of the circumstances in Indonesia would not have been so consistently revealed and explained to the Australian people. This is an attempt at a broad and comprehensive overview but, inevitably, it is also a personal account of the events that led to the *Four Corners* program and what has ensued since. Because of this, other than in this introduction, the book is written in the first person, from Bidda's viewpoint, although it has been researched, developed and written in equal partnership and collaboration between us.

2. WATCHING *FOUR CORNERS*

A Bloody Business has been described as one of the most confronting pieces of journalism shown on Australian television, yet at the time hardly anybody watched it. Sarah Ferguson's previous story, investigating the cause of a mid-air engine failure on a Qantas Airbus 380, had four hundred thousand more viewers. *A Bloody Business* was by far the lowest rating *Four Corners* story of 2011. But in the circles that make up the live export industry and its observers, all eyes were on ABC1 that night.

Clustered around a television in the living room of the suburban Canberra home of our CEO, Heather Neil, almost the entire staff of the RSPCA Australia office (some fourteen people), as well as Lyn White and Glenys Oogjes from Animals Australia, settled nervously to see how the story that had consumed many of us for the previous six months would be translated into documentary television. Although the *Four Corners* team had regularly asked us to do fact checks on much of the material they were putting together, we had no full sense of what we were about to watch. Nor did we know how the government, the public or the industry would react to whatever was shown.

Over the previous eight weeks that it took the ABC team to make the *Four Corners* program we had been particularly intensely active. We had to complete preparations for the campaign that would follow the broadcast. This involved developing a campaign website, putting together my detailed report that analysed the Indonesian footage, preparing a DVD with excerpts of the footage, campaign videos, and fact sheets about the trade—all of which was to be given to politicians the day after the broadcast. Everything was developed in close co-operation with Animals Australia, indeed we had decided to co-brand the whole campaign, an innovative step that promised greater political leverage. If this sounds calculating, then that is exactly what it was. We had met such concerted and persistent resistance from government that it was decided we had to become increasingly strategic and do everything possible to maximise the impact of the evidence. However valid might be

the arguments being made to government for continuing the trade, the enormous extent of the suffering it caused was being consistently downplayed, if not ignored. We knew that cattle in Indonesia would continue to suffer while the release of the footage was delayed during the making of the program but had come to recognise by this stage that nothing short of a massive shock to the status quo had any chance of changing it. We hoped *A Bloody Business* would provide that shock.

We were also closely watching for a response from the export industry. Because Ferguson had interviewed a number of its key players, including showing some footage to Cameron Hall, the head of the export industry's marketing, research and development arm, Livecorp, industry groups were already attempting to control any effect the program might have. They started their fight on the Sunday a week before *Four Corners* on *Landline*, ABC television's rural affairs program. This was followed the next Tuesday with a piece on *6.30 with George Negus* on Channel Ten. Then, on Friday the 27th of May, Livecorp and Meat and Livestock Australia (the MLA, Livecorp's equivalent in the red meat and livestock sector) announced the suspension of the supply of cattle to three Indonesian slaughterhouses. They claimed that any animal welfare problems at a fourth facility could be addressed through training.

To any of the media outlets that contacted us for comment, we made this response:

This is a predictable and completely unacceptable PR response to a situation that will be fully revealed on ABC's Four Corners on Monday night. Livecorp and MLA are completely aware of their culpability in animal cruelty in Indonesia and are terrified that it is about to be exposed.

MLA and Livecorp are beyond redemption. They have known what is going on in Indonesia for over a decade. They have a clear track record of promising to act only when exposed and it's time government and producers called them to account. When the situation in Indonesia is revealed it will be abundantly clear that the only acceptable solution will be a ban on live exports to that country.

The uncompromising view expressed in this statement might seem extreme, coming as it does before much evidence to substantiate it has

been presented here. One of the purposes of this book is to elucidate exactly how such a position was reached. So condemnatory an attitude had long been in the making as we saw these industry bodies failing to address the trade's systemic problems through many years.

Furthermore, it is a salient aspect of the economic debate over the value of live exports that not even everyone involved in the cattle industry supports the trade. Among this intense jostling of factors and events over those last days before the broadcast was an interaction with the three major beef processing companies. They allowed us to use in our campaign material a study they had recently completed which showed the devastating impact of live exports on the Queensland processing sector.

Throughout that Monday, the nervous anticipation in our office was incredibly palpable. One of the virtues of working for an NGO is that policy can be pursued without being fettered by political expediency. One of the handicaps is that everyone beyond your organisation is at full liberty to ignore those policies. The weight of evidence we had assembled seemed beyond contradiction to us, but would *A Bloody Business* be the fulcrum that at last forced the world of political gamesmanship to accept the facts?

And so we waited anxiously crowded together for the familiar theme music that would announce the start of *Four Corners*. Lyn, who had taken most of the original footage, stood right at the back of our group throughout the 40 minutes, unable to settle. Her tension was tangible. As the story developed I scanned the room assessing my colleagues' reactions. We had briefed everyone in the office but many had not yet seen the images Lyn and I had been watching and evaluating for the last two months. Even I was staggered at how much of the raw, blood-filled footage had been broadcast, and it was clear that some of the scenes were too much even for those who had been expecting something shocking. I was also surprised by unexpected aspects of the program. For instance, on their own trip to Indonesia, the *Four Corners* team had filmed at Santori abattoir, one of the very few that had instituted stunning (to render animals unconscious before slaughter). By

showing better practice, the program underlined the inadequacies of the vast majority of Indonesian slaughterhouses. When the program ended I felt as though I had been winded. I looked around at the others, wondering what would happen next. Then everyone's mobiles started ringing. Already the campaign website, switched to live at the start of the program, was being inundated with supporters seeking a way to vent their outrage. In that exact moment we switched from weeks of intense behind-the-scenes preparation to campaigning on a scale that was to overwhelm our working and personal lives for months to come.

3. BEFORE INDONESIA

Of course, the story begins very much earlier than May 2011, much earlier than the commissioning of the *Four Corners* program, and much earlier than when Lyn White first entered an Indonesian slaughterhouse with a video camera. Australia's export trade in live animals has a long history, but awareness of the trade among animal welfare organisations was, until relatively recently, centred on the Middle East.

Until 2003 the efforts of RSPCA Australia were concentrated on the serious welfare problems of long-distance shipping of livestock. When I wrote my first report on the trade to the Middle East in 1998 I had no information about the fate of our animals once they landed there. Control of their treatment overseas was generally considered beyond the influence of the Australian government. Of course, exporters had developed these markets, were present in them and were well aware of conditions without raising any concern at home. From 2003, when Lyn joined Animals Australia and began to document and expose the appalling treatment of our sheep and cattle in these markets, it became clear that there was a continued Australian responsibility for the way our animals were slaughtered overseas. Even then, concern about the issue remained centred on the Middle East and this continued to be the target for animal welfare organisations for another five or six years. Many strategies were used over that time to try to raise awareness of the plight of exported animals, from a number of in-depth investigations by Animals Australia, to behind-the-scenes efforts to improve standards, to media responses to disasters, to full-on advertising campaigns and the emerging use of social media as a means of harnessing the energy of supporters to directly lobby government. All of these focused on the animal welfare cost of live exports—the unnecessary suffering caused by the trade.

In 2009, RSPCA Australia took a slightly different approach in an attempt to counter industry comments on the importance of the trade to the Australian economy. The organisation had been calling on the government for over 30 years to examine the economics of phasing-out

live exports and replacing them with a carcass-only trade. In the absence of government action, we commissioned our own independent study from an economic consultancy firm favoured by many in the agricultural industries, ACIL Tasman, to look at the farm-level adjustments that would be required if live sheep exports from Western Australia were phased out.

The advice of government relations experts is never to take problems to politicians without also presenting constructive solutions. Coming up with such solutions is also an ethical responsibility of anyone arguing for social change. The full consequences have to be considered, including the effect on producers and the economy in general. The ACIL Tasman Report found that although structural adjustment would be required, it was within reasonable limits. While the scale of live exports of sheep was considerable—4.2 million sheep left Australia in 2008, with over three-quarters from Western Australia farms—only between three and seven per cent of income for those farms with flocks of greater than 300 sheep came from live export. With a five-year phase-in of increased prime lamb production for the chilled meat market and more grain cropping, the cost to farmers was estimated to be between three and four per cent of the investment value of the sheep. The report enabled us to offer evidence that the economic cost of agriculture that met sound animal welfare criteria was not great, and the animal welfare benefits enormous. Quite apart from ethical concerns, it has long been clear that the potential advantages of a reputation for humane farming are considerable.

The report was ignored by government and industry, with industry groups continuing to talk-up the value of the trade and issue its own report examining the consequences of an immediate ban rather than the well-managed, pragmatic phase out of live exports of our report. One of the unfortunate aspects of polarised political issues remains the powerful tendency to argue exaggerated consequences of changing the status quo. Ironically, this is the very accusation levelled consistently against *A Bloody Business* when it showed unalloyed, straightforward evidence. Inevitably, it was the decision to show that evidence as a shock

weapon that both galvanised outrage against the live trade and fuelled the backlash.

While there were adjustments over this period to the regulation of the trade (most notably with the introduction of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock following the *Cormo Express* disaster when nearly 6,000 sheep died at sea after rejection by Saudi Arabia), ending the export of livestock for slaughter is a concept requiring a fundamental change in policy that no federal government of any colour has yet been willing to embrace. We may have offered evidence that ending the live sheep trade would not be economically destructive, but a dogged assumption remains that economic advantage trumps ethical responsibility and indeed is damaged by it, and that the two are finally mutually exclusive. It is an assumption that must continue to be challenged, with the case for the advantages of an ethical industry properly and persistently argued. As this book will show, our nearest neighbour, New Zealand, has taken this path with success.

It was also not until 2009 that RSPCA Australia began to pay any considered attention to the Indonesian trade. Our board had asked that we examine exports to Asia, so that we could be sure of where our priorities should lie, and, furthermore, coalescing snippets of information had begun to raise questions about Indonesia. Various incidental discussions made us aware that federal government and industry money was going towards the installation of restraint boxes for the slaughter of Australian cattle there. At face value this seemed a positive development because the proper restraint of cattle should make their slaughter more humane. But there was no information about the quality of this initiative, or the extent of its reach into the region and this caused us concern. Until then, the shorter shipping voyages for animals to Indonesia—only a few days—had made this aspect of the trade less of a priority for our investigation than the gruelling trip to the Middle East which lasted up to four weeks. At the time, a joint government-industry funding committee was making decisions on where to channel money into training and new infrastructure in importing countries—our view was that these funds should be targeted into a small number of locations to help lift

their standards, and that Australian animals should then only be moved through these improved supply chains. A type of ‘closed system’ was already in place in Egypt where cattle were only allowed to be exported to a single feedlot and abattoir. This was set up in response to the exposure on *60 Minutes* of atrocities at Basateen abattoir in 2006, based on one of Lyn’s previous investigations, and was intended to provide some level of assurance that there would be a degree of control over the treatment of animals. However, it did not include any defined standards and cattle were still being slaughtered inadequately and without stunning.

So it was then that RSPCA Australia wrote to the Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke, and Cameron Hall, from Livecorp, asking if we could visit Southeast Asian live export markets to observe the treatment of Australian animals. We were denied that opportunity. In September 2009, after a brief correspondence about the nature of such a trip and initial feedback that our request was being considered, even facilitated, we were told verbally by Livecorp that a visit from the RSPCA was not welcomed by their trading partners in the region. Our *aggressive opposition to Australia’s livestock export industry and links with more hostile animal rights groups* were both cited as factors counting against us, despite there being no evidence of these links or that our policy position on live export had compromised our ability to work with government and industry in the past. It’s worth noting that at this time we had never campaigned directly about conditions in Southeast Asia for the very good reason that we did not know enough about them.

What we didn’t know then was that the industry was organising its own Indonesian study tour without us, to take place in March 2010. This might appear to be coincidental, but there is a pattern here. Whenever the spotlight is turned on a particular aspect of the trade, the industry attempts to neutralise the debate by quickly commissioning its own study or report that presents the situation as they would like it to be seen. While this might be a natural defence of an industry under pressure, these studies have been consistently one-eyed in their approach and selective in their data. This intentional strategy to undermine the process of examining the conduct of the trade is particularly

galling when the industry is itself always included in government-led reviews or committees and is able to contribute directly to their findings. The same ploy was used again in 2012 when an industry report on pre-embarkation inspection processes for sheep at export ports was presented to a government-organised committee that had just assembled in Fremantle to review the very same processes. The audacity of this strategy appeared to unsettle even the most guarded of the bureaucrats present. Unsurprisingly, the industry report supported the current Fremantle inspection arrangements, despite this system delaying the final health and welfare inspection of sheep until moments before they run up the ramp onto the export ship.

Despite our initial ignorance of the industry trip to Indonesia, the refusal for us to visit was a warning signal in itself and one that drew more of our attention there. But it was not until December 2010 that I was directly alerted to the way in which Australian cattle were being slaughtered in that country. Before then I knew very little about existing MLA-funded programs to install restraint boxes and train Indonesian slaughtermen in their use. There was some information published on the MLA website, but it is very hard to find specific reports there unless you know what you're looking for. But on 3 November 2010, Heather Neil received an email from the Trade and Market Access Division of the Department of Agriculture, asking if we could attend a meeting to be given *an update on recent projects undertaken in overseas markets, with a particular focus on the work done in Indonesia.*

4. 'GENERALLY GOOD'

The Department of Agriculture offices in Canberra are in a high-rise, glass-walled building. Security demands visitors are swiped in on arrival—this in contrast with its previous offices where, until the era of terrorist awareness, it was once possible to enter and leave with almost total freedom. In a long room with a broad view over the campus of the Australian National University to Black Mountain, Heather and I sat across a table from representatives of the live export industry, including Livecorp's Cameron Hall, listening to the former Dean of Veterinary Science at the University of Melbourne, Professor Ivan Caple. We were there to discuss the report of the trip that Caple and three other 'independent experts' had undertaken to look at the treatment of Australian cattle in Indonesia. Also in the room were representatives of the department, including the head of the Trade and Market Access Division, a section solely devoted to increasing Australia's export capacity.

I will never forget that day, because it was then that I came to fully understand two fundamentally intertwined realities: that the way in which Australian cattle were being slaughtered in Indonesia was completely unacceptable; and that no one in that room intended doing anything about it. As the meeting progressed, it became devastatingly clear to me that however cruelly these animals were treated, it was no constraint on the overriding imperative to sell them overseas. This was in a year when cattle exports to Indonesia would total nearly 800,000 animals.

I had known Caple for several years—he had been Chair of the National Consultative Committee for Animal Welfare and had acted as a scientific advisor to RSPCA Australia—and knew his liking for anecdotes. On this occasion he relayed his information as though describing an overseas holiday, complete with scene-setting snapshots, except that most of the photos were taken in slaughterhouses. He told us how the group went to eleven slaughterhouses and observed the slaughter of twenty-nine animals. While he didn't claim everything they saw was perfect, Caple said he had been impressed with the standards he had seen and that the restraint boxes the MLA had installed—a design we

would later come to know as the Mark 1 box—were a great improvement on traditional Indonesian roping slaughter. He reiterated the report's conclusions that the welfare of cattle in Indonesia was *generally good* and that any issues that needed to be fixed were best addressed through current industry programs.

Preceding the meeting we had been sent an agenda, and it was only then that it became clear there was a new report on conditions for cattle in Indonesia and that it would be presented for discussion. As soon as I read this, I emailed the department and optimistically asked for a copy so we could look at it ahead of the meeting. Unexpectedly—this had never happened before—it was emailed back to me. To begin with, things did not look so bad—the report began with sections on the transport and handling of cattle, then their treatment in feedlots, and while it lacked detail in terms of what was seen, the findings and recommendations seemed appropriate. But it was the section on slaughter that rang alarm bells in my head.

The findings of scientific papers are always structured in the same way: first the results are presented and only after this are any conclusions drawn, but these must always reflect and build on the actual data under discussion. To draw conclusions prior to presenting any data is a red flag to any analytical reader. So, to read in the report that restraint boxes *were observed to offer significant benefits during the slaughter process* and *the adoption of stunning processes would be unfeasible*, before being told anything about the nature of the slaughter process, immediately aroused my concern. I started to ask myself a series of questions: Why was there no description, diagram or photograph of a restraint box in the report? How did animals fall over when restrained? How could a slaughterman take, as reported, up to eighteen cuts to sever the carotid arteries? Even the language of the report was stilted, using euphemisms like *lateral recumbency* to describe the way cattle were forced onto their sides for slaughter. What, I asked myself, was the *head lifting* and *head slapping* referred to and what did this mean for the animals involved? Why were there no references to the existing scientific literature on welfare during slaughter? It seemed clear the report understated significant

problems and overstated the positives. Take this sentence for example: *Some instances of unnecessary stimulation involving interference with the eyes and tail twisting were observed immediately prior to slaughter once the animal was restrained and cast.* I tried to imagine exactly what this meant for the animals involved.

As I examined the report and started to piece together the evidence, including researching the history of the Mark 1 box, I could not believe that anyone, especially a cattle vet with Caple's experience, could possibly find acceptable (let alone *good*) the way Australian cattle were being slaughtered under these conditions; slaughter that involved the animals being tripped over onto a concrete slab and held down while they struggled to get up, before having their throats cut multiple times while fully conscious. Travelling to the meeting at the Department, I was already dismayed by the findings of a report glaringly at odds with its own evidence. The disjunction seemed so obvious that I hoped to be able to convince the Department officials how untenable were the report's conclusions. Listening as I sat opposite Caple, I was filled by an increasing sense of outrage that he did not name as cruel what he had witnessed, as well as by the lack of response from the Department officials. Sometimes official silence in the face of evidence, and the conclusions it makes obvious, is devastating. Our systems and processes should never fail so totally. They should never be so bound to prevailing politics.

Back in the RSPCA Australia office, we talked about the scale of the problem—that 103 of these Mark 1 boxes had been installed in Indonesia using Australian taxpayers' money. We estimated that something like 1,700 cattle were being killed this way every night. The extent of what we had learnt was truly shocking to us, even with our regular exposure to incidents of animal cruelty.

5. THE NORTHERN CATTLE INDUSTRY

To understand why *A Bloody Business* caused such a reaction from cattle producers as well as the public, it's necessary to understand why the northern cattle industry has been so reliant on Indonesia as a market for its animals, and for that we must go back to when the trade was in its infancy.

Australian farmers have a long history of finding ways to earn a living in harsh conditions and on unpromising or marginal land. Those who attempted to raise cattle in the north in the early days faced the same need to adapt. The cattle industry in Australia, which first prospered in the southeast, was based on European breeds suited to relatively regular rainfall and temperate conditions. They did not fare well in the tropical north. Furthermore, the great distances to centres of population for the domestic market presented another obstacle. It was the introduction of the American Brahman breed, descended from the Indian Zebu and thus suited to the challenges of the tropics, and the development of direct trade overseas, which offered the opportunity for the expansion of cattle production in the north. European beef cattle breeds such as Angus, Hereford and Charolais had been selected for their high meat yield: Brahmans are heat and tick resistant but produce comparatively less saleable meat. Over time, crosses between European breeds and Brahmans and the introduction of further tropical breeds from other countries improved the suitability of the herd and ultimately the yield and quality of the meat they produced.

There were several external factors shaping the demand for Australian beef and livestock in overseas markets that also drove the expansion of cattle production in the north. Graziers there imagined a future feeding the populace of Asia, but although some exports began to be made to the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and even Japan and Hong Kong from the late 1950s and 60s, they were erratic. The opening of the United States to imports of hamburger beef in the 1960s provided a market for the relatively lower quality meat that the northern herd produced, and at that stage there were some local abattoirs to service that trade. Then, in

the 1970s, a government-funded campaign to eradicate brucellosis and tuberculosis from Australian cattle vastly improved the management of disease. It was an ambitious and expensive exercise conducted on a vast scale and driven by the need to maintain access to US and European beef markets. Eradication was made even harder by the size and remote nature of northern cattle properties and the presence of infected feral buffalo. In some areas entire herds were destroyed in order to remove the disease and buffalo were mustered and shot in huge numbers. While the exercise is still regarded as a breakthrough in animal disease management, it was conducted, as all too often happens, with little regard for animal welfare.

In the late 1980s a stronger market emerged for live exports to Southeast Asia. Initially the trade was in breeding animals with the intention of supplementing domestic production, and then in feeder animals: young cattle that were not yet large enough to slaughter but could be exported into newly established feedlots where they could be fattened up more cheaply than if they remained in Australia. The feeder export trade began in the Philippines but was soon established in Indonesia. That Indonesia was also free of foot-and-mouth disease helped shore-up this relationship, Australia being one of the only exporters with a similar foot-and-mouth-free status. By the mid-90s the trade to various Asian countries had expanded to over half a million cattle a year. When a dispute over banana imports in 2000 provoked the Philippines government to reduce Australian cattle imports, Indonesia was already well established as the primary export market and northern cattle producers had restructured their businesses to meet a growing Indonesian demand. It was not long before they would become completely reliant on this one market for their entire annual stock production (known as *turnoff*). Because producers earned a premium from live export to Indonesia, the unreliable supply of cattle to local abattoirs eventually caused their closure. This increasing focus and dependence on one market made northern producers unusually vulnerable. Their cattle were unsuitable for the domestic market because it was difficult to achieve full body weight on northern pastures and transportation

distances and costs to the south were too great. Because of the neglect and consequent demise of local abattoirs and chilled meat exports, by the late 1990s there was almost no remaining practical option but to export these animals.

Looking back at the development of the live cattle exports to Indonesia, it is remarkable how no one at the time appeared to consider the animal welfare implications of the burgeoning trade. This was the 1990s—the era where political correctness was at its height—yet it is as though the trade was taking place in an ethical void. Perhaps it is not surprising given that the trade was out of the north—out of sight, out of mind and out of the oversight of regulators. In a setting where stations are so large that cattle and cattlemen (and women) may only meet once a year at mustering time, this is extensive farming at its most extreme, closer to feral animal management than the traditional concept of farming. Perhaps the treatment of animals in Indonesia, where local cattle live in close proximity to their owners and are handled and killed as individuals, seemed a kinder world in comparison. But most likely, no one in the trade ever really gave the issue any thought. Live exports meant a good price per head and a guaranteed buyer for your cattle, and that was, and for many in the trade still is, all that mattered.

6. THE *BUSH TELEGRAPH* INTERVIEW

A few weeks after the meeting at the Department of Agriculture, when the Caple report was finally released without a single picture of an animal in it, I found myself alone in a cubicle in the ABC's Dickson studio in Canberra waiting to be interviewed down the line on Radio National's *Bush Telegraph*. As I fidgeted nervously with my notes, the presenter, Michael Cathcart, asked Professor Caple to tell him about the report. I listened, again dismayed, as Caple continued to push the argument that the treatment of cattle in Indonesia was *generally good*, justifying the slaughter method of tripping cattle over onto concrete by roping their legs (the way the Mark 1 box works) as being *approved by the world organisation for animal health*. This assertion, a serious misrepresentation, further disturbed me. Caple then explained that he and his co-authors had to deliver a report that met the objectives of the industry bodies that commissioned it. At this point, the interviewer suggested he should be careful to make sure that was what he really meant.

It is important for academic researchers to maintain a dispassionate and objective position when examining evidence. But when an academic takes on a job where they are expected to reach an informed opinion and make recommendations about what to do next, they are given the licence to express that opinion openly and without fudging. At its heart, the difference between my point of view and Caple's was whether what he observed in Indonesia was acceptable treatment of animals or not. We both agreed that slaughter practices could be improved, and that working to make such improvements was a good thing. But what we disagreed about was whether it was, and is, acceptable to export animals where poor outcomes are entrenched without first making adequate improvements.

Sitting in my cubicle listening to Caple's voice, I was shocked at the support lent to the live export industry by everything he said, and the extent to which he could ignore what this meant for the animals involved. If a veterinary academic who had held senior appointments in animal welfare could be so unconcerned about the serious implications

in what he was saying, then how could the RSPCA hope to change government policy which inevitably relies on advice from people like him? It was becoming clear that the usual processes for improving animal welfare were seriously inadequate. This is a hard lesson to learn—faith in our institutions is intrinsic to a cohesive society. We want them to work. Any adult understands, and can accept to some degree, that our systems of government are imperfect but, listening to what Caple said on *Bush Telegraph*, I lost a fundamental level of hope for even incremental improvements through that system. I had spoken before in public, most uncompromisingly at the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy Conference in 2008, about the risk the industry was taking by not treating the issue of animal welfare seriously and voluntarily adopting improvements. I had warned that public concern about the treatment of animals in agriculture was growing and eventually the welfare movement, unwilling to wait any longer, would harness and encourage this changing attitude through intense campaigning. After *Bush Telegraph* that day I was further convinced that only the political pressure of an enormous grass roots campaign could achieve real change.

During the interview I found myself trying to describe what it was like for a 450 kilogram Brahman steer to be slaughtered in a Mark 1 restraint box. It was at this point I realised that words alone were not enough for an audience to understand what cattle were enduring—we desperately needed video evidence. If we were to effect change then we had to make the situation real through such footage. But who was going to take it? Up to that point the only video of Australian livestock in importing countries had come from Animal Australia's Lyn White. But Lyn's experience was all in the Middle East. She had no contacts in Indonesia. Who might I talk to who understood that country? Who might have the contacts to be able to follow a shipment of Australian cattle and get inside an Indonesian abattoir?

7. THE ANIMAL WELFARE MOVEMENT

The animal welfare world in Australia is relatively small—most of the players know each other and regularly interact. At the same time, the sector is populated by many organisations that occupy slightly different spaces, some devoted to single issues. Clearly, what brings them together is a shared advocacy for the welfare or rights of animals, but what separates them are differences in their underlying philosophies and in the scope and type of their activities, audience and supporter base. The RSPCA is the oldest and most recognised of them all—we know from market research that 95 per cent of Australians know the name RSPCA and connect it with animals, and most have had some interaction with the organisation at some point in their lives. The RSPCA tends to be mainstream, as you might expect from an organisation with a history going back nearly 200 years, a federated structure (each state has its own organisation, with RSPCA Australia the national body overseeing policy development), along with a statutory role in enforcing animal welfare legislation. That said, one of the organisation's founding aims was to lobby for improvements to legislation—that is, to push the boundaries of the establishment—as our understanding of the impacts of human activity on animal welfare develops. Preparing a case and arguing for improvements to guidelines, standards, regulations, and legislation is essential to my own role at RSPCA Australia.

Despite this, in the eyes of some other groups, the RSPCA has a reputation as being overly bureaucratic and too accepting of the slow-moving pace of progress. There is a level of posturing and denigration that goes on between groups jostling for prominence in the space we share, and this accusation is one of the rocks sometimes thrown in our direction. This aspect of the NGO world has always saddened me. It seems so wasteful and indulgent to be arguing among ourselves when there is so much urgent work to be done. While this is a recurring problem, there is also a great deal done in constructive cooperation. As with any area of work, individuals build relationships with their colleagues across organisations behind the scenes; often they move between them as jobs

demanding expertise in animal welfare are limited, and people with the required skills and experience are few.

Animals Australia is the other main advocacy group with a national focus. It began as an affiliation of small like-minded groups, some, like Animal Liberation, state-based, and others focused on a single issue, that individually lacked the capacity to lobby at the federal level. The formation of Animals Australia (previously called ANZFAS—the Australia and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies) provided them with a single national voice. From the start, the positions of some members were more animal-rights based than RSPCA Australia, but the organisations have much in common, both having had a seat at the federal government’s table when animal welfare matters were up for discussion. Indeed, those of us representing our respective organisations have often considered strategy together before such meetings to help maximise our impact, as have our counterparts in the agricultural sector. For many years Glenys Oogjes, Executive Director of Animals Australia, sat on the board of RSPCA Victoria and was an observer at RSPCA Australia annual general meetings. These connections waned as legislation governing NGOs tightened in order to codify the responsibility of the people running such organisations. The focus of boards shifted, to some degree, from discussing issues to managing the direction of their organisations. Interactions between my office and that of Animals Australia continued, sharing information and coordinating action, but even this was circumscribed at times.

The main point of difference between the two organisations has been over interaction with the farming sector. A degree of disagreement has at times been caused by Animals Australia criticising sections of the RSPCA for being too close to farming interests. While my own view is that RSPCA policy has not been skewed or influenced in this way, I can understand that, viewed from a different standpoint, another perception has been possible. I would suggest, though, that overall the differences between Australia’s welfare organisations are relatively minor, and the complications of self-interest and politics play less of a role in our sector than in many. We are less plagued by careerists both because the salaries

our organisations offer are relatively low, and because people attracted to these jobs are almost invariably motivated by genuine concern for animals.

Whatever tensions have arisen between Animals Australia and the RSPCA, none has stopped us interacting when needed. Importantly, when I got hold of the Caple report in December 2010, with three days to consider its contents before the meeting at the Department (and no stipulation for confidentiality), I immediately sent it on to Glenys for her input, which she gave readily and valuably.

Because of the compounding proportions of the live export issue, in January 2011 Glenys and Lyn came to our office for the first face-to-face strategy meeting between our organisations for some time—I'd not had much interaction with Lyn before this meeting. It involved constructive discussions for most of the day, still particularly concentrated on the Middle East. The Caple report had not yet been publicly released but I remember again how I needed to vent once more to them both just how negligent I thought it was.

In early February I had a call from Lyn asking that I meet her and a veterinarian who had recently been working in the trade, Dr Lloyd Reeve-Johnson. A little like something from a cloak and dagger movie, it was arranged for us to meet in a place where no one would recognise Reeve-Johnson—the café of the National Gallery in Canberra. Another vet who had been working on live export ships, Dr Lynn Simpson, came along to give him moral support. After every voyage the vet has to provide a report, including daily and cumulative mortality figures. Reeve-Johnson told us that the exporter had fudged his figures to reduce his reported mortality rates. We took the information seriously and Lyn went away to attempt to corroborate the story with further evidence. Before long, though, the Indonesian investigation would take up all her energies. That night, while she was still in Canberra, I went to her hotel to talk further. She was in a dark mood about her work and, as I listened and tried to offer what support I could, a natural connection began to develop. She was back in town towards the end of that month and we had dinner together. During the evening we discussed difficult

issues, airing our views relaxedly, and this openness, I feel sure, helped our ability to work together over the months to come.

So, as I wrestled with what could be done about the Indonesian situation, and who could investigate what was happening there, it was to my own set of connections that I applied my thinking. Of course, Lyn's experience in the Middle East occurred to me, but I kept coming back to the question of who I knew who was thoroughly familiar with Southeast Asia.

8. DISCUSSIONS IN MELBOURNE

Within a week, I was in Melbourne for a meeting about a research program on pig welfare and had arranged while there to see Kate Blaszak. Kate, a vet who had initially trained in Melbourne when Professor Caple was Dean of the vet school, had worked for several years in the Bangkok office of the World Society for the Protection of Animals before moving to Laos to help run an agricultural aid project. Kate and I had been friends for several years and she was as shocked as I was about the Caple report and what it indicated. Luckily for me, she was back in Melbourne briefly for a conference, for I wondered if she might know someone who could go to Indonesia and film its abattoirs. We met in my hotel room along with Lisa Chalk, RSPCA Australia's Communications Manager at that time. By strange coincidence, Kate told me she had something of great interest to show us—footage taken by an activist group who had visited a number of Indonesian slaughterhouses, ports and feedlots in August, just a few months earlier.

Gathered around Kate's laptop, and squinting to cope with the jerky movements on the handheld camera, we saw what Kate had described in an email as *truly gut wrenching*. The footage showed several slaughters—cattle pulled over using ropes, men crouched beside them cutting at their throats with short knives, animals tied down on the ground blinking and breathing for up to ten minutes while they slowly bled to death, others hoisted off the ground by one leg while still clearly alert, others having their skin cut and peeled back while still alive. At one port, the group had filmed cattle being hoisted off the open deck of a small ship by their horns and then lowered into the back of an awaiting truck. All the filming had been done openly, much of it in government-owned slaughterhouses. These were confronting scenes that revealed the primitive nature of Indonesian animal husbandry, but they all showed locally bred animals (distinguished by their relatively placid nature, small size, and the head ropes they all wore). Later, when I looked at where the group had visited it was mainly Bali, the neighbouring islands of Lombok and Sumbawa, and East and Central Java. There was no

overlap with the locations Caple and his co-authors had been taken to which were all further to the west. So, while the footage did not tell us anything about the fate of Australian cattle, it made it even clearer how absolutely crucial it was to find this out. But Kate had no direct contacts who might have undertaken the task.

Following the meeting with Kate and Lisa, I caught a tram across the city to the Animals Australia office to talk with Lyn. I shared my developing perception of the situation in Indonesia, the seriousness of the problem, and we discussed how important it was for someone to go there and film what was happening. The information I had was limited, but it was what the Caple report *didn't* say, and Caple's own clear alignment with the industry, that deeply concerned both of us. My research had shown that in Java and Sumatra, the main destinations for Australian cattle, there were about 750 abattoirs comprising 4,000 slaughter slabs. From one MLA report I had found a list of eight locations where Mark 1 boxes had been installed (there were many more unlisted). From Google I had also found another list with the addresses of about twenty government slaughterhouses in Jakarta. Lyn and I talked about who would be able to film in Indonesia and how difficult it would be to gain access to slaughter facilities.

Lyn is an extraordinarily determined and dedicated person who faces complex difficulties and intensely challenging situations with great calm and courage. Her first visit to the Middle East was in 2003 in response to the *Cormo Express* disaster, one of many investigations she has conducted at great personal cost, into cruelty to animals exported from Australia to the region. By the end of the meeting, she had already made up her mind that she would now go to Indonesia.

9. EXPORTERS' PRIDE

Australia is the world leader in livestock exports—the fact that we export more animals over longer distances than any other country is regarded a badge of honour for the industry. Pride in the trade is promulgated by industry bodies that represent producers or exporters. Before *A Bloody Business*, Livecorp was used as the main voice for the trade, with its CEO, Cameron Hall, the key spokesperson. Rural research and development corporations like Livecorp receive their funding from statutory levies on transactions—in Livecorp's case they receive sixty cents for every 'head' of sheep exported and just under a cent per kilo for cattle (that's \$3.80 for a 400kg steer). The money raised is used to promote the industry, conduct research, help members negotiate with government bureaucracy, access new markets, develop existing ones and instigate in-market training and infrastructure programs. Hence the MLA and Livecorp names so prominently displayed on the Mark 1 restraint boxes in Indonesian abattoirs. Every dollar spent on research and development is matched with an equal tax-payer funded dollar from the federal government, with the proviso that research includes both 'industry good' and 'public good' components. How this split is determined or measured is a mystery.

Following the damage done to the trade by the reaction to *A Bloody Business*, and the bad press that savaged Livecorp, promotion of the trade has been controlled by the Australian Livestock Exporters Council (ALEC), the national peak body for the export industry. The ultimate aims of ALEC and Livecorp are much the same—they both represent the interests of export companies—but, as a public company, ALEC is not tied to any requirements associated with matched government funding and can therefore act solely as a mouthpiece for exporters. It's hard to know much more about ALEC as the company had no public presence until recently (its website only came online in 2015). Its views are made known through regular media statements, the occasional submission that ends up on the public register, and frequent Twitter commentary. Two of the main messages ALEC pushes in these statements

are that the export trade is essential to the livelihoods of Australian producers (despite the fact that it does not actually represent those producers), and exporters are focused on improving the welfare of exported animals. For example, a May 2014 media release quotes ALEC CEO Alison Penfold stating, *live exporters are fundamentally attuned to the health and welfare of livestock as it is a vital component of industry profitability and sustainability*. Behind the scenes, exporters' efforts are decisively focused on expanding and maintaining their markets.

It is undoubtedly true that most producers care for the welfare of their animals. Not only are their animals their livelihood but most farmers develop an understanding and a bond with their stock, however transitory, from raising and working with them. Concern for their health and wellbeing becomes inextricable from the increased value of stock in prime condition. Similarly, exporters want their animals to be in a condition when they arrive overseas that will satisfy the requirements of their customers. But there are notable differences in their motivation. Exporters have no intimate knowledge or connection with the huge numbers of animals they carry across the seas. Nor do they always have the same financial imperative to treat their cargo well. For instance, in Australia, producers are paid according to the quality of their animals at the saleyard or abattoir, while exporters are usually paid according to the numbers or weight of the animals they deliver. One regular example of the financial expedience of the trade comes to mind here. In preparation for a shipment, exporters will source and assemble sheep over several weeks at their pre-export feedlots. Despite decades of research indicating that selection of sheep is the most critical factor in determining mortality during export, when a ship comes in for loading there is often a last-minute scramble through dealers and saleyards to find anything available to fill the remaining numbers in a consignment, without any regard to their provenance. At this point any sheep will do, because it's more profitable to fill the ship and lose some animals on the voyage than to leave with empty pens.

Despite such practices, it has been argued that exporters do have some ethical concern for the animals they trade, yet while it seems true

that some companies make a greater effort than others to improve welfare, the evidence does not bear out that this concern is broadly based or well-developed. Industry has regularly claimed that Australia's presence in overseas markets helps to improve standards in these countries, but it is clear that this is a *post hoc* justification. Again and again, breaches of standards reveal how little control or influence we have over our animals once they leave our shores. The simple truth is that the demand by some countries for live animals, and the relatively low cost of live export, creates an extremely lucrative market. The trade is essentially opportunistic, as are many of the arguments in its favour. The industry's badge of honour is in reality a badge of expedience. This is a point we will have to come back to throughout this book.

There is a further, profound issue here. The ironic contradiction in industry posturing that it exists to improve welfare conditions overseas is its steadfast refusal to properly address the conditions on the ships that take our animals to those markets. That's not to say that standards prior to, and during, the export process haven't developed or improved at all over time, but most of these changes have been relatively superficial. When the key issues are examined—such as pen space on-board ship, the amount of bedding provided, and the level of veterinary care animals receive—there has been strong and continued resistance to change. Exporters are unwilling to accommodate additional costs if there are no matching returns in profit. While this is understandable financially, it betrays a basic reluctance to face the ethical requirements that validate commerce. This inadequacy is constantly justified by the assertion that animal welfarists unscientifically exaggerate the needs of animals.

For example, the ALEC media release of May 2014 also stated that: *RSPCA's claims that stocking densities are incorrect demonstrate a lack of practical understanding of animal behaviour and manipulate animal welfare motives to make the trade unviable.* The words 'practical understanding' are a euphemism for the acceptance by people within the industry of animal husbandry practices that those on the outside find unacceptable, such as transporting sheep for weeks standing on their own manure in a pen where they have less than one-third of a square metre of space

for a 50 kilogram animal. The way this density figure was arrived at is noteworthy in itself as it had nothing to do with understanding animal behaviour—in 1969 in an abattoir lairage, merino wethers were run into a pen until it was full of standing sheep. They were then counted. This ‘standard’ is still exactly the same today. As an animal behaviour scientist I take stringent care to evaluate the real needs of animals, drawing on all the evidence I can lay my hands on. For example, there is (peer-reviewed) scientific research that tells us that sheep need at least twice this space just to be able to lie down and stand up properly. My awareness of this type of evidence is what drew my close attention to the live export trade in the first place, rather than the search for convenient justifications of a point of view. The RSPCA sets priorities according to the seriousness of the evidence for cruelty to animals and opportunities for change, rather than some irrational grab-bag of things we should do. Somewhat ironically, the manipulation of motives, in fact, typifies the live export industry, one driven too much by self-defence rather than objective concerns. ALEC’s comments are, of course, intended to undermine the credibility of the RSPCA.

It is true, though, that improved conditions on export ships, while making life better for those animals involved, would result in the trade being less profitable. This is actually the nub of the issue—the nexus between poor conditions and financial reward is exactly what makes the industry exert such effort in combatting its critics. The industry regularly produces reports that consistently validate its established standards for animal welfare but that do not make it into the peer-reviewed scientific literature. The suspicion that industry has influenced the methodology of these reports is substantiated by their use of evaluative techniques that most independent scientists would reject as flawed. Some worthwhile research is conducted through industry-funded programs, but industry has the final say on the trial design and the wording of their reports and then picks and chooses the results it likes. Admittedly, there are other elements in the equation that facilitate live exports, such as the fact that slaughter overseas is cheaper than it is here because of our more expensive wage structures. But this, too, is an economic issue

complicated by ethical concerns.

That economics is of such paramount concern for exporters is explained by their very survival depending on shipping live animals. But this is not true for producers, who may get better prices from the trade but would otherwise be better off joining those farmers whose animals are humanely slaughtered in Australia for domestic consumption or meat export, which, after all, is what happens to well over 90 per cent of sheep and cattle and is far less ethically fraught and also less economically vulnerable.

The industry brags about having the best standards in the world, because our standards are more detailed and prescriptive than any other country that is willing to participate in this trade. But these standards still fall far short of providing a good environment, and ensuring a duty of care, for the livestock they are intended to protect. The imperative for an exporter is that enough animals reach the other end alive, preferably heavier than when they left—in other words, that they survive and ‘cope’ with whatever is thrown at them throughout the journey. The imperative from an animal welfare perspective is that their experience, their quality of life during the days and weeks of their journey, is a positive one and that their slaughter is swift and humane.

By contrast with industry pride, the export of live animals has long been a badge of dishonour for the animal welfare movement worldwide. There is no animal welfare organisation in the world that supports the concept of transporting livestock long distances from one country to another, simply to be slaughtered at the other end. Given that transport is inherently stressful, and long-distance sea transport is associated with increased suffering and mortality, live export for slaughter is regarded as an unnecessary source of suffering. Even those pragmatists who tolerate the trade on economic grounds agree that, in terms of animal welfare, it is a second-best option. Glenn Sterle, a Labor Senator, encapsulated this sentiment in a comment during a 2014 Senate Estimates hearing: *I have been very clear on the record throughout my time in parliament that I am supportive of the live animal export trade—well, no, I would rather not see it; I would rather see everything processed here, but that is not a financial reality.*

To slaughter animals in their country of origin and export their meat is a logical alternative that not only reduces animal suffering but also ensures that the quality of the product can be controlled. While the voyage to Indonesia is short relative to the one to the Middle East, it is long compared with the standards set in the 1990s for the transport of animals in Europe, where any trip over eight hours was considered excessive. During that decade, the RSPCA in the United Kingdom ran a high profile campaign to stop live exports across the English Channel to continental Europe. In Australia, with our enormous distances, transport even within our own borders often far exceeds this postulated eight-hour limit. This is indicative of the entrenched structural problems in changing our attitudes to animal welfare. But then, so much of our attitude to animals is defined by this country's unique landscape and the harsh realities of the history of European settlement.

The precedent for exporting livestock overseas for slaughter, without much regard for the consequences, had been set long before cattle exports began in earnest. Live sheep had been leaving Western Australia, the state from which 85 per cent of sheep still exit the country, since the mid-1800s. The first regular overseas destination for Australian sheep was Singapore which by the mid-1940s was importing up to several thousand sheep per shipment. At the time, there were no purpose-built livestock carriers, so animals were exported in small ships converted temporarily for the voyage, or as deck cargo in larger ships. For instance, in 1946 *The Geraldton Guardian* reported that the *Charon* had berthed to load 2,500 sheep, 2,000 cases of tomatoes and fifty cases of beer, all bound together for Singapore.

A similar approach was taken when trade to the Middle East began in the 1960s. In time, the demand for Australian sheep in the Gulf region rapidly expanded, leading to the conversion of larger vessels into dedicated livestock carriers, so that by the mid-1970s ships were in use that could hold up to 50,000 sheep. During the first decade of this century Wellard operated the massive fourteen-storey *Deneb Prima* out of Australia, which could hold up to 130,000 sheep or 25,000 cattle in a single voyage. Today's vessels can carry up to 75,000 sheep or 18,000

cattle although they often carry a mixed cargo of both. By the early 1980s, a trade that had exported only a few thousand sheep annually at the turn of the century was now at an almost unimaginable scale, with 7.3 million sheep exported in 1983. In Western Australia reliance on these exports was heavily entrenched, with 45 per cent of turnover going to these markets.

The rapid growth in the trade did not come without serious complications. As the export of live animals began to absorb a greater proportion of the annual turnover, the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) became militant in trying to protect its members' jobs. Through the late 70s and early 80s, fierce confrontations continued between producers and meat workers. In 1979 the National Farmers Federation was formed and its role in establishing the Farmers Fighting fund in order to take on the AMIEU was an important structural change in Australian agri-politics. It is important to remember that this was overwhelmingly a conflict between competing economic interests, with animal welfare barely figuring in the equation. While farmers may have won better returns in the growth of exports, there were collateral problems. The redirection of stock, with a consequential closure of Australian abattoirs, and the long voyages and unregulated slaughter suffered by millions of animals, were losses not properly evaluated at the time. The RSPCA did raise the issues involved, and as early as 1978, RSPCA Victoria President, Dr Hugh Wirth, attempted to confront the industry and government with the dire repercussions of the expanding live trade.

While the scale of exports to the Middle East has lessened, some two million sheep are still exported to the region annually. The sea journey lasts for two to four weeks, with many sheep dying from heat stress and failure to eat on the way. Anything up to two per cent mortality over that period is considered 'normal', but if extended and considered as an annual mortality rate (the usual measure), it's the equivalent of a quarter of any sheep flock dying. It's worth thinking about the series of events that sheep go through prior to boarding a ship to understand what some vets in the trade term the 'cumulative stress' that they experience.

Export sheep are trucked from their property of origin, or via a saleyard, to a feedlot where they are held prior to export. Here they are mixed with other groups and held for several days (sometimes weeks if loading onto the export ship is delayed) either in bare paddocks or packed into wire-floored sheds and introduced to the pelleted diet that they will eat for the rest of their journey. Loading for export brings another round of drafting and trucking, and then the sheep are crammed into pen after pen on multiple decks, with limited ventilation and little room for movement or even adequate space to lie down. While most sheep will experience and cope with the stress of trucking and drafting several times in their lives, the ordeal of a sea journey in such close confinement is completely different from the environment they were reared in. For most exported sheep it is a journey they will endure, but for some it proves too much. In 2014 15,889 sheep were reported to have died during export voyages.

During export, the regulation and management of sheep and cattle differ markedly. Partly due to their relative size, but mostly due to their higher economic value, in many respects cattle get a much better deal. To start with, the individual attention meted out during selection for live export, when cattle have to be checked and vaccinated for diseases, means there is less likelihood of unsuitable animals slipping through, although it does still happen. (On the one occasion when I have had access to the wharf during loading of a live export ship—tolerated as part of a government advisory committee reviewing the inspection processes, an investigation I will come back to later—I witnessed this myself, seeing a steer with an infected eye pass through the drafting gate before he could be stopped.) Once on board, cattle are given better conditions and more individual attention than sheep, with an effort made to treat illness and injury. Except for those destined for Russia, Turkey or the Middle East, most cattle spend less than ten days on-board ship as the journey times to Southeast Asia are so much shorter. The difference in treatment is reflected in the expectations for mortalities during the journey—the death of one in a hundred cattle on a long-haul voyage (more than ten days at sea) is enough to trigger a mandatory investigation of the voyage,

whereas it takes two in a hundred sheep to die before a similar investigation is required. Put another way, the death of a sheep on-board ship is given half the significance of the death of a steer.

It is hard for anyone outside the industry to know what it is like on a live export vessel, because the export companies don't allow observers on board to film conditions. This alone should set off alarm bells for both our regulators and the general public. Lynn Simpson, who made fifty-seven voyages as an on-board veterinarian, has described conditions thus: *Animals are regularly injured while trying to rest in crowded pens. They are stepped on, with leg, muscle, tail and pizzle damage. Newborns have been trampled to death. Animals have been smothered... There is noxious ammonia, faecal waterfalls, severe foot damage, and deliberate water deprivation in high heat.*

Commenting on conditions once our animals arrive at their destinations, a former Egyptian government vet, Dr Mahmoud Abdelwahab, said in 2013 that: *Egyptians don't care—and our government doesn't care—about animal welfare. We only care about meat inspection. Before an animal is killed we don't care. So no one orders the workers to stop these bad activities and there is no punishment. So it continues.* Sadly for Dr Abdelwahab, speaking out in defence of animals and other social justice issues has made him *persona non grata* with the Egyptian government. Such treatment, as we will learn, is not restricted to Egypt.

These are the conditions and practices we passively condone because it is possible to avoid seeing or thinking about them. This is not the public's fault. Industry, and government through tacit complicity, avoid paying attention to the truth, or actually obscure it, so that we will not demand better. For this reason alone, there is cause to question industry pride in its business model.

10. SLAUGHTER IN INDONESIA

Lyn White had never been to Jakarta before, but her earlier career as a police officer as well as her experience in the Middle East prepared her for the difficult task she had set herself. She had also arranged for her long-time collaborator, a professional investigator who specialised in animal cases, to join her and act as a second cameraman. In fact, her investigation was much more straightforward, but far more horrible, than we had expected.

Slaughter in Indonesia is a late-night business. The killing begins after midnight so the meat is ‘fresh’ the next morning. Fresh it may be, but it is not clean. The conditions in most Indonesian slaughterhouses are not something that is pleasant to think about. But despite the appalling environment, in the end finding and filming these places was much easier than any of us had anticipated. Driving around in a taxi and asking a few locals, it didn’t take long for Lyn to end up at the nearest backstreet slaughterhouse. And, as unlikely as it may seem, no one seemed to think it was strange having a blonde Australian woman and her male companion carrying video cameras and wandering onto the killing floor. The Australian equipment installed there—the Mark 1 restraint boxes I had read about in the Caple report—may have been the reason, but Lyn and her colleague were able to film openly, moving from one location to another in the course of the night.

From the first night of filming, it was obvious that the brutality of what was taking place to Australian cattle was far worse than we had thought. After visiting only one facility, Lyn thought she had enough evidence to warrant the suspension of the trade. I was at Adelaide airport waiting for a taxi when Lyn sent me the first text message from her Jakarta hotel revealing how bad things were. I spent the morning in a meeting utterly distracted and wishing I could do more than just send the odd encouraging text in response, but knowing that the job Lyn was doing was something I could never attempt. After Lyn spent two more gruelling nights visiting further abattoirs, it was clear that the problems she was recording were endemic to the industry. Then she flew

to Medan, in the north of Sumatra. It was there she filmed the worst abuse to an animal that she had ever seen.

According to their publicity and marketing, the live export industry cares about animal welfare. At the time, an industry-funded website, *Live Export Cares*, argued, with the help of a photo of a smiling young woman cuddling a baby lamb, or of an archetypal Aussie farmer with his young family in a paddock of steers, why live exports are good for farmers and how the industry can be trusted to take care of exported animals. It told the reader how Australian exports are essential to ensure that improvements can be made to conditions overseas. What Lyn had filmed in Indonesia told a diametrically different story—one of the abuse of animal after animal in restraint boxes emblazoned with the logos of Livecorp and the MLA, in slaughterhouses where the industry had sent in trainers to show the Indonesians how to trip, hold down, and cut the throats of these animals. Soon after *Four Corners* was broadcast, the *Live Export Cares* website disappeared from sight; its very name had become impossible for the industry to lay claim to. The industry and its apologists have consistently argued that *A Bloody Business* by being based on Lyn's footage exaggerated and distorted the situation. In truth, neither Lyn nor I had expected to find anything like the practices revealed by her investigation. The barbarism she encountered was so transparent, so unguarded, and so pervasive that exaggeration was hardly possible. Our concern was whether any broadcaster would have the stomach to show even a small proportion of the reality she witnessed. Broadcasting scenes of cruelty to animals is a guaranteed ratings disaster. We already knew that when, in 2006, Richard Carleton broke the story on *60 Minutes* of cattle being stabbed, beaten and slashed in Cairo's Basateen Abattoir, ratings for that program fell by half.

Lyn returned from Indonesia a shell of the woman who had left. The experience had drained her so completely many of us around her were worried for her mental and emotional welfare. But she was driven by the task we faced, the urgent necessity to expose the total failure of an industry that sanctioned the reprehensibly inhumane slaughter of Australian animals night after night. I would like to pause here to

reiterate this point—it is easy to forget the reality of such cruelty when our lives continue normally day by day. Revisiting the footage Lyn took, for those who can stomach the task, is a gruelling reminder that every day large numbers of animals do continue to suffer because of this trade. While none of us can spend every moment focussed on suffering in all its manifestations around the world, it is fundamentally important that we try not to minimise or avoid responsibility for it when it is ours.

I met Lyn in Braidwood, in southeast New South Wales, to give her the keys to a house on the coast where she could start the process of editing her footage away from any distraction. I followed the next day, to see for the first time on video what she had seen in person. The experience was indeed gruelling, far more so than even I had expected. I am trained to dispassionately, without exaggeration, analyse, interpret and explain animal behaviour. I take pride in applying scientific criteria, in being reasonable. Studying Lyn's video evidence I experienced a profound disjunction between my concentrated analytical evaluation of the material and a deep emotional distress at the horror of what I was viewing.

To decide the approach I should take to my analysis, I watched the first slaughter Lyn had filmed, late on the evening of 15 March. It being impossible to show here what I saw, I shall try to describe it:

For the first time I am looking at a Mark 1 box—this one looks recently installed and has the names Meat and Livestock Australia and Livecorp stencilled boldly in red paint on the side door. The steer within has already been roped—he is lifting his legs up in irritation and is peering out from underneath the box. A man opens the side door and the stencilled words swing away, revealing a sandy-grey steer with his head down in what I would define as a fearful stance. The steer steps down onto the concrete ramp leading from the box and trips onto his side as the ropes around his front and back legs go taut. At the same time a hose is being sprayed at him, soaking him across the head and back. His body slips down the ramp and his head slams against the metal bar of the blood drain; the hosing continues. The steer tries to get up three times, each time slapping his head on the blood drain. During the struggle the rope tied to his back leg comes off and his rump slips over the edge

of the plinth as his back leg is no longer tied. The steer struggles, kicks out and ends up back on the plinth. He slips off another time before being pushed back up. One man then grabs the steer's ear and another grabs his eye. The steer vocalises. A third man attempts to push the steer's rump back up onto the plinth as he keeps slipping down off the wet concrete. Two men are still holding the steer by head and mouth. A third makes four cuts to the steer's throat in a sawing motion as the steer lies half-on, half-off the ramp. The steer is thrashing his head, blood spraying from the gaping wound, as the slaughtermen move away, their job apparently complete. A fourth man is still hosing down the steer. The steer attempts to rise, then his head slaps back down again onto the blood drain. The hosing continues. His chin hits the blood drain and he again tries to right himself. By this time the steer is almost completely on the floor with just his head over the plinth. All the while the fourth man is standing nearby, directing his hose at the thrashing animal. Yet again, the steer attempts to rise but instead falls off the plinth onto the floor. Still bleeding profusely from the neck, the steer stands up. (I find this hard to believe—the gash in his neck is so deep, the bleeding so great that surely he should have lost consciousness by now?) One of the men has been holding the rope that's still around the steer's front leg and he now starts to tie this to the metal rod on the blood drain. The steer staggers forward, heading across the slaughterhouse floor straight towards the camera, towards Lyn, before the rope stops him. Somehow he manages to push himself up four more times before he finally stays down, flicking his tail, rocking and making a sickening gurgling sound. The hosing starts again and one of the men approaches with a rope which he loops around steer's neck, pulling against the raw edges of the wound. By this stage the steer is back facing the plinth, still desperately attempting to escape. Despite the rope around his neck, he slaps his head on the door of the box, then again on the plinth. Behind him, one of the slaughtermen approaches, knife in hand. He leans over and slashes at the steer's nearside back leg, cutting the tendon in two. The steer vocalises and kicks back, pushing himself along the wet floor. He is now lying on the floor, gurgling and breathing heavily. The hose man continues to spray him with water. The rope is untied from around the steer's neck, and the slaughterman puts his foot on the steer's head and makes more cuts at the steer's throat. He vocalises in response, his eyes rolling,

mouth moving and tongue hanging out. In the meantime the animal that had been waiting in the raceway is now in the restraint box having his legs tied. He is peering beneath the box in the direction of the dying steer. The sequence ends as the steer lies on the ground, still gurgling and opening and closing his mouth. The whole gruesome process had lasted nearly three minutes.

At this point it might seem hardly necessary to give any further evidence of the abject failure of animal welfare standards in Indonesia, but it is important to give a sense of its real extent. In Australia, considerable thought and resources have been invested in the infrastructure of abattoirs and the training of their workers to provide ways of moving animals from arrival to the killing floor that minimise the need to directly handle or distress them. Then, the standard is that cattle must be stunned before slaughter so they are unconscious when being killed. Apart from ensuring cattle are saved from enduring the pain of throat cutting, pre-slaughter stunning also means they are no longer capable of reacting to, or being frightened by, what is going on around them. What happens to them after stunning can no longer hurt them. Also, abattoir workers have no cause to fear injury from an unconscious animal in the way they would from a frightened, alert steer many times their own weight. In a society where hundreds of thousands of animals are slaughtered every day, getting these standards right is absolutely essential.

There was no stunning in the abattoirs that Lyn visited. In handling the cattle prior to slaughter there were multiple instances of workers using coercion, force and extreme pain to move and restrain animals. Cattle were kicked, slapped, prodded, goaded with sticks and had their tails pulled, twisted and in some cases broken to try to make them move. When these attempts failed, some had their eyes poked and gouged or were roped and dragged along the ground, one steer was moved in this way after suffering a broken leg. The reasons this happened were multiple: very badly designed holding pens and raceways (dark rooms, narrow entrances, slippery floors and other hazards) meant that cattle resisted moving forward; the workers themselves had no understanding of how to handle the huge yet frightened Brahman steers they were faced with and reacted with aggression and disregard for the suffering they were

causing; and the way in which the cattle were forced onto the ground for slaughter was violent in itself. Even one such incident would have been enough to suspend a worker or prosecute them for cruelty had it occurred in an Australian abattoir. It is reasonable to remember, though, that these abattoir workers, used to small relatively docile cattle, were afraid of our animals, and their ineptitude, if not their cruelty, in dealing with them is partly explained by this fear.

To kill a steer without stunning, its head and neck have to be held still so the slaughterman can stand close enough for long enough to safely cut the throat. This requires some form of physical restraint. Indonesian cattle, which wear a head rope for most of their lives, are tripped over onto their sides by catching one or more legs up with a looped rope. Their heads are then held steady with the head rope. As has already been mentioned, the cattle we export have little experience of close handling, let alone being manipulated and restrained in this way. Using only ropes to restrain a huge, fearful steer is dangerous for the workers involved and gruesome and unpredictable for the animal, negative factors which led to the development of restraint boxes in the first place.

Lyn's footage starkly revealed the inadequacies not only of traditional rope restraint but also those of the restraint boxes which replaced it. As well as documenting the inhumane slaughter of 34 animals using Mark 1 boxes or makeshift replicas based on the Mark 1 design, Lyn also filmed the roping slaughters of four Australian animals. This footage showed how cattle were caught with a rope around their neck, a rope which was then tightened to pull them forward. Animals were goaded and beaten to make them move, and further ropes were looped around their legs to pull them over. The floor was deliberately made wet and slippery and each animal fell down multiple times as the workers attempted to get them into a convenient position for the throat cut. Once down, their legs were tightly bound or tied to bollards to prevent further movement

Once cattle were restrained, whichever the method, the attempt to cut their throats was appallingly managed, usually with multiple sawing cuts. A number of animals with partially severed throats regained their

feet or attempted to do so. Cattle with clear signs of consciousness were left to suffer for long periods before finally being killed. Clean severance of the veins and arteries around the throat is essential for cattle because of a secondary blood supply through the back of the neck. The short, blunt knives and fearful approach of the Indonesian slaughtermen made such severance far less likely.

While the Mark 1 box may have helped to reduce the risk of injury to workers during the restraint process, Lyn's footage now confirmed what the evidence in the Caple report had actually suggested—that it failed abjectly to protect the cattle involved from cruelty.

We knew from previous investigations that Lyn had conducted that it was usual for the industry—and the government—to dismiss her footage as the exception rather than the norm. What she had filmed previously had regularly been dismissed as 'isolated incidents' of cruelty. I had a real fear that they would attempt to dismiss the Indonesian footage in this way. We had to demonstrate that the problems depicted were endemic and we had to be able to refute the conclusions of the Caple report that *welfare was generally good*. We also needed to base our arguments for the suspension of live exports soundly on the available science. So while Lyn was cutting an edit for our pitch to the media, I started the process of measuring the experience of each of the fifty animals she had filmed being slaughtered in ten abattoirs: how each animal was handled, how long it took, how it was roped and tripped over, how many times it tried to get up, how many times it vocalised, how many knife cuts were made, and how long it took to lose consciousness. This involved not just one viewing of each slaughter, but a painstaking process of observing, scoring, pausing, rewinding and repeating to check each measurement. In the end I watched every slaughter multiple times, many of them in slow motion. I carefully and thoroughly took these numbers and used them to quantify the story in a way that the Caple report, which was largely descriptive, had failed to do. The report that emerged from this analysis became a key element in our case to government that cruelty in Indonesia was endemic and institutionalised by the introduction of the Mark 1 box.

Using video to record the behaviour of animals allows you to analyse that behaviour in great detail. It's a tool I used extensively during my PhD studies of primate behaviour although the technology was less advanced back then. But watching animals being killed badly over and over again is a very different task from observing the social interactions of primates. It was an utterly draining and depressing experience. For Lyn, editing the footage was living the nightmare of her visit over and over again. But you can't pitch hours of footage to a busy TV producer—you have to find and put together the most powerful and relevant parts so they form a coherent visual summary. You also need to have all your facts cogently organised.

When an issue seems overwhelmingly clear to you, it's hard sometimes to see how those outside will react and therefore judge how best to communicate your message. It was during this time I realised how astute a campaigner Lyn was and saw her unique capacity to recognise how best to capture the public's imagination and harness its support. Out of the hours of footage we reviewed, Lyn knew that by focussing on the fate of particular animals and telling their individual stories, we could engage the public better than with a grab-bag of shocking images. This was not just good campaign strategy but is also an intrinsic point—all animal welfare legislation is framed in terms of the suffering of individual animals. It took over a week to think this through and prepare our brief. There was also another question which we discussed at length. Where in the media should the evidence be taken?

11. PAST EVIDENCE

As a migrant to this country I observe our worst practices both with a sense of identifying guilt and an outsider's critical detachment. It's unlikely, even had I grown up in Australia, that I would have given the live export trade deep consideration back in the 1980s. I was still in high school and much too distracted by riding my horse, lip-synching to pop songs and chasing boys to have time to think about sheep. But I did read the newspaper and follow politics, up to a point, and I usually had an opinion on the big stories of the day. So, I imagine if I had grown up where I now live, in the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales, I couldn't but have noticed the story of 40,605 sheep dying at sea in 1980 after their ship, the *Farid Fares*, caught fire and sank southwest of Kangaroo Island. In this country there was enormous media coverage at the time, with many hundreds of letters being written by members of the public to the Minister for Primary Industry, Nationals MP Peter Nixon.

It was in response to this incident that the federal government sent a veterinarian from the relevant body at the time, the Australian Bureau of Animal Health (ABAH) on a live sheep voyage, a trip which was to trigger a series of reports and recommendations for reform of the trade. That vet was Dr Roger Meischke, and an edited version of his report documenting the voyage of the *Dorrit Clausen* from Esperance to Bandar Abbas in Iran in September 1980 was released the following year.

The ABAH report found multiple deficiencies in the conduct of the trade that *needed to be rectified*. These included: inadequate pre-export preparation; 'topping-up' of consignments at the last minute with unsuitable sheep; poor facilities in yards, feedlots and on-board ship; unskilled people involved in handling and supervision; the provision of low quality feed and water; and ventilation issues on the vessels. These were problems with enormous consequences in terms of animal suffering—at the time the report was being drafted, exports were expected to exceed six million sheep for the year. While the Fraser government accepted

all the conclusions and recommendations in the report, and introduced new standards, the actions taken did not effectively address the problems identified. Reading through the list of deficiencies now, over 30 years later, it is disturbing to see how many of the problems seen then are still inherent in the trade.

Despite moving to Australia more than fifteen years after the sinking of the *Farid Fares*, I have crossed paths with many of the veterinarians who helped shape the government's response at the time. Several are still key players in the trade, while others moved on long ago. One of the latter, pushed away by events that transpired after his 1980 voyage report, is Roger Meischke. I first met Meischke at the Australian National University when reviewing the work of its animal ethics committee of which he is a founding member. At the time I knew I had heard the name, but didn't connect it with live exports. It wasn't until meeting him again in late 2011 that I came to understand exactly how close things had got in the 1980s to shifting government support away from live exports towards a meat-only trade, and how similar the events back then were to what has transpired since 2011.

For several years now, ever since he was prompted to contact me in the aftermath of the *Four Corners* program, Roger and I have met to talk over coffee about the politics of animal welfare. Sometimes we spread our documents across an expansive wooden table in a busy Bungendore café. Sometimes we settle into the comfortable winged armchairs of the Canberra Hyatt. Always, there is too much to talk about and too little time. But it is in these conversations that I have learnt much of the history of the live export trade that is not recorded in government reports and statistics.

Back in the early 1980s, the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare was working through an agenda of various issues. This cross-party committee had been set up at the behest of the leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Don Chipp, and during its tenure examined many challenging aspects of animal welfare including the kangaroo industry, horseracing, the use of animals in research, and intensive farming. In 1985, it conducted an enquiry into the export of live sheep from Australia. The

committee's enquiry provided the first real opportunity for politicians to hear in depth about the reality of the trade and clearly revealed just how little consideration had been given until then to its consequence for the animals involved.

Again, it is chilling to consider how so many of the accounts in the report from the enquiry still rang true in 2011, and still do so today. The members of a 1982 Sheep Meat Study Mission to the Middle East recounted their experiences to the committee. Seeing Australian sheep in Saudi Arabia being sold for private slaughter was described thus: *Sheep in small pens were bought from traders in the suburbs and then transported in high temperatures in the boot of a car.* One member of the study group recounted: *It was very cruel. I have seen those same animals put on the floor with a foot on the head and a knife just run across the throat.* Another pointed out the inherent risk of backyard slaughter during religious festivals, and how sheep need skilled handling to be killed humanely: *There is no way you can do that if you do it once a year and use inadequate methods or tools.*

Colonel Harries, the head of the South Australian RSPCA, and regional government veterinarian Dr Dennis Napthine (the same Dr Napthine who went on to become Premier of Victoria), described the scene in a Kuwaiti abattoir: *The entire operation was conducted in a welter of blood and would have been totally unacceptable in Australia on grounds of cruelty and lack of hygiene.*

Comparison between Australian abattoirs and those in the Middle East inevitably raised the question whether it is acceptable to export Australian animals to countries with substandard and cruel conditions. Jack O'Toole, Secretary of the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union, expressed his view on this matter: *We believe that the standards that we impose upon ourselves in Australia should have some relevance to the stock that we are exporting.*

Several pages were spent discussing the relationship between animal welfare and economic considerations in the live export trade. The report outlined the division between the values-based arguments of animal welfare advocates in seeking an end to the trade, and the monetary-based arguments of the industry and government agricultural economists. But

while critically observing this division, the committee faced its own problems in resolving it, stating: *The committee has found it difficult to reconcile economic value with animal welfare.* In the end, the senators failed to rise to this challenge.

The report acknowledged the scale of the animal welfare problem documented by the enquiry, recognising that *there is little doubt that sheep suffer during the journey from an Australian farm to an abattoir in the Middle East* and that slaughter conditions fell well short of what would be acceptable in Australia. The view of the committee on the animal welfare impact of the trade was made abundantly clear in this historic statement: *The Committee came to the conclusion that, if a decision were to be made on the future of the trade purely on animal welfare grounds, there is enough evidence to stop the trade.*

But, of course, no decision involving government is ever made on such grounds alone—animal welfare in commercial agricultural production can never be fully divorced from economics. So, despite reaching such a bold conclusion, and acknowledging that reform of the trade would not eliminate the *stress, suffering and risk* posed by the live export journey, all twenty-nine recommendations in the report ended up focusing on the details of the way the trade was conducted. Buried on page 186 is the real solution: *the Federal Government should promote and encourage the expansion of the refrigerated sheepmeat trade to the Middle East and other countries, with the aim of eventually substituting it for the live sheep trade.* Yet this did not even make it into the list of recommendations.

It is a sad fact that farm animal welfare has always been compromised in Australia. When compared with many other developed countries, ensuring livestock are well treated is of lower priority. The phasing out or elimination of discredited agricultural practices like caged egg production, sow stalls, and other practices that prevent animals from moving freely or expressing their natural behaviour, is retarded here compared with most nations in Western Europe and across the Tasman in New Zealand. The reasons for this may be complex but surely have their roots in the pioneering beginnings of white settlement. The rapid struggle to open up our agricultural lands, the difficulty of establishing

viable farming from virgin land in an uncompromising landscape often ravaged by drought, reduced the niceties of the process. In fighting for subsistence, let alone a living, off the land, every corner was cut almost by necessity, and this set up a pattern of behaviour, a fundamental view of the world, that became entrenched even when our circumstances became more secure. Farm animals were essentially caught up in this process.

Of course, as already acknowledged, good farmers develop an understanding and sympathy for the animals they rear, and many Australian farmers have made a real effort to do just that. Nonetheless, the basis the settlers started from was one of harsh economic realism, a realism that failed to build in the sort of structures that assured that economics and welfare were welded together. In consequence, the divide between animal welfare organisations and agricultural industry is larger than it should be. It is a built-in problem that the animal welfare movement and industry too often start interacting from a position of mutual mistrust or antagonism rather than working together to make successful farming humane. On the one hand, the difficulties faced by farmers are minimised, and on the other, the advantages of a reputation for good welfare, let alone its ethical imperatives, are downplayed.

The public outrage and the investigations and reports that followed the *Farid Fares* disaster brought the government as close as it has ever been to ending the trade. If it had not been for the conservatism of the senior bureaucrats of the time, especially the economists amongst them, the balance could well have tipped the way of the animals. As the 1985 Senate enquiry report points out, the relationship between animal welfare and economics is a tense and argumentative one which all too often ends in acrimony. What was left in terms of a settlement was a government commitment to incremental improvement of a trade, the very existence of which was acknowledged as a second-best and cruel option. In the words of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics at the time, *although money is not everything, what comes second is often a long way behind*. It would take over 20 years and the fierce publicity surrounding the *Cormo Express* disaster before government forced the industry to

accept mandatory standards for the preparation and export of livestock, and 27 years and the exposure of the treatment of Australian cattle in Indonesian abattoirs, before government eventually made exporters take even some basic responsibility for the treatment of Australian animals in importing countries.

12. THE ABC VISIT

Thank goodness for the ABC. It is a sad fact that even a statement such as this can be questioned in our national discourse. Our public broadcaster should be universally valued both for the breadth of views it documents and for supporting healthy questioning of the way our society operates. Instead, it is often attacked by sections of society for leftist political bias. Whether or not this is true is almost impossible to evaluate simply because most of our media so trenchantly supports the status quo that journalism attempting to present any diversity of views is seen as being too radical. Here we have a very dangerous symptom of political myopia in this country. Instead, the broad examination of policy possibilities, seen through a prism of competing factors, is fundamental to good decision making. These factors, including animal welfare, should be seen as parts of an integrated picture, not one pre-emptively coloured by ideology.

Yes, thank goodness for the ABC. I think it's safe to say that without *Four Corners*, the public would not have heard about the mistreatment of our cattle in Indonesia. *Four Corners* is the only current affairs program that has a full 40 minutes to develop a story like this and do it justice. When the ABC is criticised for political bias, it should be remembered how little in-depth, investigative radio or television journalism would happen without it.

Thank goodness also for our timing. When we rang *Four Corners*, Sarah Ferguson and her producer Michael Doyle had just finished a story. They were free the next Thursday. It just happened that of all *Four Corners*' journalists, Ferguson and Doyle had an intimate knowledge of Indonesia.

We knew none of this when we turned up at the ABC Centre in Sydney armed with a DVD and a few carefully formulated pages of briefing notes. All we felt was a raw knot of anxiety that no one would be able to show the footage and the story would never be told. We had considered taking our evidence elsewhere, indeed had already approached *60 Minutes* because *Animals Australia* had worked with the

program several times before and Lyn felt we should speak to her contact there first. The response was clear—this was too intense a story for commercial television to dare to take on. The reluctance had nothing to do with the quality of the story, only the likely effect of such cruel and visceral footage on ratings.

The *Four Corners* team had asked us to text them when we were on the way into the city from the airport and, when Lyn and I arrived by taxi at the ABC building in Ultimo, Ferguson and Doyle were waiting outside to meet us. Our nervous anticipation about the meeting, our determination that this story had to come out, combined with the distinct possibility that no one would be brave enough to take it on, was relieved to some extent when it immediately became clear how seriously Ferguson and Doyle were taking us. They led us to a meeting room in the *Four Corners* section of the building. There was a television and DVD player in one corner. Through a glass wall we looked out into an office with half a dozen desks where, as we later learnt, the program researchers worked to check and corroborate every detail of a story.

We began to talk Ferguson and Doyle through the background that had led up to Lyn going to Indonesia—the Caple report, the refusal of government to engage with evidence of malpractice, and the background evidence we had begun to put together. We talked for over an hour before taking up the DVD of Lyn's edit of the footage and turning to watch the screen in the corner of the room. Ferguson had been using a large red and black notebook while we talked but now she held it up so it partly hid her face. At intense moments in the DVD, she lifted it to shield her eyes from the gruesome images. Five minutes into the viewing, she leant back in her chair and said: *We will do whatever it takes to get as much of this on air as we can.* By the end of the viewing, it was clear just how stunned both journalists were by what they had watched, the quantity of the evidence and the extent of the cruelty. Ferguson wanted Lyn to give them all the unedited footage to review. This was going to be a detailed and painstaking process. It was only in the taxi on our way back to the airport that it fully sank home to us how much had been riding on the meeting—and that we now had one of the best investigative

journalism teams in the country working on the story.

The problem, though, with *Four Corners* is the time the process takes, the effort required to prepare and put together a story—they told us they needed eight weeks, six if we were lucky. That was eight more weeks that we couldn't act on the footage. It turned out that the full eight weeks were required not merely for the researchers to check and recheck the facts—Ferguson was punctilious, phoning both Lyn and me to ask numerous questions, some of them multiple times, making sure of every detail—but also because Ferguson's and Doyle's visas for Indonesia took a long time to come through. In order to corroborate Lyn's video evidence, they would have to witness and film cattle slaughter in Indonesia first-hand.

One of the main criticisms levelled at the RSPCA and Animals Australia after *A Bloody Business* was aired was the accusation we should have taken the footage to government earlier. Why had we allowed thousands more animals to suffer while *Four Corners* put their program together? This was something that weighed heavily on our consciences over that eight-week period. But we felt there was no acceptable alternative. Persistent government and industry intransigence had reduced the options and raised the stakes. Governments had repeatedly refused to act on previous evidence and industry had consistently acted to neutralise that evidence when it was compromising, rather than address it by improving its practices. After seven years of investigations in importing countries with no substantial improvement in outcomes, it had become abundantly clear that the only reasonable chance to bring about change was to address the public directly through full media exposure. If *Four Corners* needed eight weeks, we felt we had to give it to them. We had to take the resultant flack. Animals were suffering and would continue to suffer regardless. The hope was to transform the trade, or end it, so that unnecessary suffering would cease forever. Tellingly, much of the criticism at that time came not from the public, or even from farmers, but from industry and those politicians who most vocally supported it. In retrospect, the irony in this criticism is spellbinding. Proclaimed concern for these animals amounted to little more than crocodile tears.

What those eight weeks did give us was time to prepare for the reaction to the program; time to ensure that we were able to harness that reaction, to give people a way to express and focus their concern and outrage on the right target. One of the key decisions made at this point was that RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia would have the one co-branded campaign website. While Lyn and I had been working closely together for some weeks now, for our organisations to have a formal public association was no small thing, given the underlying differences in philosophy. Considering the relatively lower public profile that Animals Australia had at the time, there were clear benefits for them in terms of the broader reach that linking with the RSPCA would provide, but there were also considerable benefits for the RSPCA in terms of maximising the impact of our campaigning. Crucially, Animals Australia held the footage that would be at the heart of the campaign. But above all else, combining our efforts would result in the best outcomes for animals. It was clear that the advantages of a united front far outweighed any criticism the RSPCA might attract about being too close to a group that some viewed as too radical.

The work that went on over that time by the teams in both our offices was phenomenally intense. In Adelaide, Animals Australia's Creative Director, Karen Nilsen, began building the joint campaign website. By this time Lyn's idea of telling individual stories based on the experiences of particular animals had been cemented, and that was to form the basis of Karen's creative concept. In Canberra, their colleague Michelle Stone organised a weekend shoot in one of the small television studios in Parliament House. Lyn and I were to be filmed in a series of pieces to camera that would be used to introduce the stories of the individual animals. Up until now Lyn's work on editing the footage and mine on analysing it had been complementary, but as the scripts for these pieces went back and forth between us, the sense of real collaboration grew. Lisa Chalk and I reviewed the scripts and were impressed with how Lyn had been able to capture the animals' stories in only a few sentences without minimising their experiences. As the day of filming approached I felt increasingly nervous about whether I could pull off speaking into

the camera without appearing wooden, but also about how this would embed me as one of the faces of the campaign. I had done plenty of media before, but none so personal and direct.

Apart from that weekend, most of my time was taken up in front of my computer screen, analysing the footage for hour after hour. Camped out in my study at home so my work colleagues would not be subjected to seeing—or hearing—repeated slaughter scenes, at times I was so engrossed it was three o'clock in the afternoon before I got out of my chair, and only then would it occur to me that I needed to go to the bathroom. I was not the only one similarly busy. The hours that Karen kept in Adelaide seemed endless, often emailing ideas through in the early hours of the morning after working all night. At times it seemed that eight weeks would not be enough to get everything done.

The story of each animal, brought together and told through the website and campaign videos, was so crucial to the campaign, we decided they all also needed to be conveyed in words, so I began to write second-by-second accounts as case studies to be attached to my report. This way, people who avoided watching the videos would have absolutely no excuse to say they did not know what they contained. When it became clear I would not have time to complete this task alone, Lisa stepped in to help. This was the first time she had looked at the footage and it shocked her profoundly, something I would only come to understand some months later. There is no doubt that the exposure to extreme animal cruelty undergone by those involved in the campaign over this time changed each of us in some way. At the time we were too driven perhaps to notice, but on reflection I worry that to some extent I have become habituated to such things by the experience; that part of me was hardened, and I do not feel good about that.

It is worth then considering, for a bleak moment, what the situation would be like had we not campaigned against live exports using the footage as a lever for change. If we revisit the situation immediately prior to *A Bloody Business*, the dreadful stasis endemic to the industry becomes clear. Only a week before the program went to air, a document was released by the MLA as a joint industry defence of cattle exports to

Indonesia. Because of the interviews *Four Corners* had already conducted with key industry representatives, their peak bodies were scrambling to defuse what they feared might be a reaction to the program. How thoroughly they misread the situation is instructive to recall. The document, the *Indonesia Animal Welfare Action Plan*, stated that the *desired outcome is that Australian cattle will be supplied to those facilities with supply chains that meet relevant sections of the OIE standards by 2015*.

The OIE (the world animal health organisation) ‘standards’ are arrived at through complex negotiations between countries with very different levels of economic development and cultural values. They are not in fact standards (a term often used to increase the perception of their status) but recommendations designed to lift practices in developing countries, rather than reflect those of developed countries. Inevitably, compromise reduces them to the lowest common denominator. So, the industry, as a pre-emptive measure, was offering to take as long as four years to introduce minimal recommendations that only offered *ongoing advancement* towards stunning animals before slaughter. This paltry attempt to defuse the issue underlines how little is achieved in public policy without real and uncompromising pressure.

What has happened since starkly proves the point. Industry has a continuing record of only acknowledging the existence of welfare issues when they are forced to by exposure of those issues by others. Self-interest may be an inevitable aspect of any area of enterprise, but those self-serving crocodile tears shed by the live export trade betray a cynicism and callousness that should be wholly rejected by the Australian public. Following the 2013 election, both industry and the Abbott government actually stepped up the export of livestock for slaughter under conditions inferior to those legislated for in Australia. These conditions also expose animals to levels of suffering—particularly with fully conscious slaughter—that the public here has shown itself to overwhelmingly consider intolerable.

13. PUBLIC ADVOCACY AND THE RSPCA

Public discourse about major issues is naturally fraught with disagreement, but the health of a society can be seen in its openness to argument and, most importantly, to the honest evaluation of new evidence. The presentation of controversial information to the media and government in Australia is often challenged by various entrenched positions and, while this is perhaps inevitable, we should be concerned about imbalances of power that minimise fair debate. It is self-evident that most of our media is owned or pressured by powerful individuals intent on preserving the status quo, and limiting discussion that might threaten it. It would be surprising if this were not true; the overwhelming evidence is that power is rarely relinquished readily. While such vested interests may be an intrinsic part of a pluralist society, their clear role in holding back change can become a serious handicap. At the broader level of the general populace, criticism of the way things are done is often met with the conviction that such ways are proven by tradition. Of course, the conservative impulse in society offers valid protection from reactive and destructive change, but it also hampers necessary reforms. Ironically, some of this nation's strongest conservative voices also selectively attack our long-established institutions when it suits them, undermining, for instance, the separation of government and the judiciary or, as already mentioned, attacking the role of an independent institution like the ABC.

Because the RSPCA is a mainstream organisation with a long-established role of protecting animals and developing the values that support that role, the public has come to rely on this role and these values. The RSPCA is expected to help enforce animal welfare legislation, provide advice on the latest welfare science and argue its case. It is a straightforward extension of this role to campaign for change when the status quo fails to meet the values the organisation upholds. That Australia has continued to allow animals to be transported thousands of kilometres to be slaughtered in countries where there are no laws to protect them, when instead they could be slaughtered here, has never made sense

to me or the organisation I represent. But such transport and slaughter is, as we have indicated, the reality lent full support by successive Australian governments and also by much of the media. Following *A Bloody Business* I have often been asked why the RSPCA took so radical an approach to exposing the trade. Many people still have no idea of the extent of obfuscation and inaction over many years by the industry and by our government. Nor is it fully understood how the public service is hobbled by the political will of government and by contradictory duties to both agricultural commerce and animal welfare.

Before those of us working on the live export issue were alerted to examine the trade to Indonesia more closely, we had, as already mentioned, reasonable expectations that it was conducted far better than it actually was, and certainly far better than the trade in sheep to the Middle East. These expectations were based on various factors. The higher price of cattle usually causes them to be treated better than sheep. The journey to Indonesia is only a few days and Brahman cattle from northern Australia are well-suited to the climate there. Many of the feedlots for our cattle in Indonesia are Australian-run. Stunning is accepted by Muslim leaders in that country. Also, the export industry claimed to have instituted an extensive program for animal welfare improvements focused on the installation of restraint boxes in slaughterhouses. Once the failure of all these factors to protect Australian animals became clear, it was our duty to uphold the values of the organisation and to work to protect all cattle being exported there. That the RSPCA has been criticised in some quarters for doing so is a peculiar, contrived distortion of reality. Of course, industry bodies, too, have the right to pursue their natural goals and to argue for them. But one of the major structural failures of the Indonesian situation was the devastating breach of trust and poor allocation of funds by the MLA and Livecorp. The levy-payers to these organisations have been seriously let down by them. Not only was money that was intended to support proper practices in Indonesia not spent as it should have been, but also the reasonable expectations of producers that the animals they sold for export were treated humanely were never met. It is often conveniently forgotten that *A Bloody Business*

also documented the disgust and sense of betrayal felt by a number of producers at the evidence presented in the program.

That the RSPCA strives to effectively fulfil its core responsibilities does not mean it fails to understand farmers' problems or their right to make a fair living. Many RSPCA initiatives are specifically aimed at helping farmers find better solutions to livestock husbandry. Some of this involves working directly with farmers or their representative bodies to improve practices. The RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme, for instance, offers pig and poultry farmers a system where, when they meet required standards, they gain favourable brand recognition from their products being endorsed by the RSPCA. The work to help make pest animal control methods more humane and effective supports farmers' attempts to protect their livestock and grazing land. The organisation also works to encourage government and industry to provide necessary infrastructure and trade diplomacy to support meat processing in Australia and expand meat exports. The RSPCA consistently argues that, given the extent to which Australia's trade with overseas markets is already supplied by chilled or frozen meat, and the instability of the markets for live exports, it is irresponsible, not to mention foolish, to go on supporting a trade that could be replaced by a more ethical alternative. While there are problems to overcome in such a transition, the essential requirement is that animal welfare and farming in this country become fully welded together so that there is no instance of built-in ethical failure in our trade. This is only fair to the long-term interests of our farmers themselves as well as to the animals they rear.

As a public advocate the RSPCA has all these roles. That one aspect or other comes to dominate at times only reflects circumstances. The persistence of serious structural failings in welfare in Australian agriculture has inevitably required us to focus on arguing for change and improvement. Although Australia's standards are often higher than in many countries in the region, our failings can be so entrenched that assertive advocacy becomes the RSPCA's greatest responsibility.

14. MEETING MINISTER LUDWIG

Well before *A Bloody Business*, and before we had seen the Caple report, Heather Neil and I met with Joe Ludwig. This was shortly after he had been appointed Minister for Agriculture following the election of the Gillard minority government in 2010. As already described, that part of our job which involves lobbying politicians has contradictory ramifications. Out of the myriad issues that swirl around politics at any given moment, the RSPCA is trying against considerable odds to focus the attention of our elected officials, including the relevant minister, on the particular matters that concern us. At the same time, we are often subject to criticism that we fail to alert our law makers promptly enough to the problems we seek to address, as happened with the footage from Indonesian abattoirs. Finding a proper balance in these concerns is also complicated by the fact that our interactions with politicians are partly about complex governmental processes and partly about dealing with individual personalities with particular strengths and weaknesses. Meeting with a minister involves all these factors.

Not surprisingly, ministerial offices at Parliament House are more extensive than those of ordinary members. A suite of rooms, including the minister's office and various meeting rooms with teleconference facilities, open from a reception area. As in all parliamentary offices, art from the Commonwealth collection is displayed on the walls, although some meeting rooms are strangely bare. So much has happened since that day, I don't clearly remember the room where Heather and I met with Minister Ludwig, on 17 November, but we did sit around a table briefing him on various animal welfare issues. Ministers are usually measured in their responses at such meetings, taking in information and making few commitments. Ludwig, still new to his portfolio, clearly knew little about many of the issues we briefed him on. This was not unreasonable in what was, in part at least, a familiarisation meeting. There was, though, one particular issue that we dwelt on. While we were meeting in Canberra, Lyn White was in Kuwait investigating the fate of Australian animals during the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice.

Earlier that day, Animals Australia had issued a media release about the inhumane handling and slaughter of sheep which included photos Lyn had just taken. This latest evidence of cruelty arising from unregulated slaughter in the Middle East was the issue we most wanted to impress on the minister.

After the meeting we sent the minister a letter reiterating the points we made, arguing that until the live trade was ended it was essential that Australian animals were sent abroad through a closed supply chain where the destination of animals is predetermined, and where they are stunned before slaughter. Indeed we put this proposal in another letter to all federal politicians: the official line back from government was that *there are circumstances that make this approach difficult*. Over the following months, it became clear that the minister had done nothing more in response to the Animals Australia footage than to pass it on to industry and ask them for proposals on how welfare outcomes could be improved. This sheeting back of responsibility to industry and lack of timely engagement was to become a pattern in the lead up to *Four Corners*.

It was only a month later that the meeting with Professor Caple took place at the Department of Agriculture (the December before *A Bloody Business*). After that meeting we wrote again to Ludwig to say that it was clear from the Caple report and other MLA reports that slaughter practices in Indonesia were unacceptable. Ludwig referred our letter back to the authors of the report. Their response was entirely dismissive: the authors *unreservedly* stood by their assessment process, findings and recommendations, reiterating their conclusion that *animal welfare was generally good*. Our questions around why the report did not comment on the design problems with the Mark 1 box were dismissed with the words, *this was beyond the scope of the report*. They also asserted that *Australia's involvement in the region through the export of cattle is delivering important improvements to animal welfare*, once again reinforcing the familiar government and industry line. Indeed Ludwig quoted these exact words when he eventually wrote back to us at the end of February 2011. His letter committed to no new action other than to send the report to the Live Export Standards Advisory Group for its consideration—an

evaluation which never occurred as the group did not ever meet again. Towards the end of March we finally received a letter from Ludwig in response to our November mail-out to parliamentarians seeking support for a closed supply chain. Ludwig said that he had *requested advice on the option of a closed loop system* and *asked industry to report to me in the first half of 2011*. While the minister made this request, from our perspective he had failed to take command of the issue and placed too much faith in an industry that had repeatedly shown a lack of responsibility for animal welfare. We felt there was no point in going back to him again. As we have already argued, sometimes the only way to overcome inertia is to attack it with devastating evidence of malpractice.

While it was Caple who had the misfortune of becoming the spokesperson for the Indonesian report, the controlling author was not even named on the document. Funded by the industry-government partnership, the visit to Indonesia had been organised by private consultant Peter Schuster, and it was he who had written the report and responded to the RSPCA critique. His task, I was later told by another member of the group, was to *produce a document that would lead to improvements whilst not providing antagonists with information which would be counter-productive*—not exactly a licence for transparency or openness in reporting. In an attempt to gain access to the data that sat behind the report (Caple had said that each panel member was given a workbook to help them record their assessment of facilities), towards the end of March Heather rang Schuster. He needed MLA and Livecorp's permission to release the workbooks, but was happy to answer any questions he could. In his view, what the group had seen was *better than expected* and he felt the difference that Australian training had made was profound. Yet again the argument was put that Australian involvement in Indonesia had lifted standards—but it was becoming clear that the benchmark against which improvements were being measured was so low anything would have been better. It was another reminder of how desperately public exposure was needed to provide any hope of preventing further animal suffering.

In the intervening weeks between Lyn's trip to Indonesia and the

broadcast of *A Bloody Business*, the minister visited Indonesia, but failed to put a foot inside a slaughterhouse. If he had, he might have saved himself a deal of subsequent angst. In a speech to the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association in Darwin in April, soon after the trip, he reiterated the government's support for the live export trade while noting more needed to be done to *achieve higher standards of animal welfare*. A few days later, Heather and Lisa Chalk met with one of Ludwig's advisors for a catch-up and made it clear just how much more did need to be done. Heather had phoned him a week earlier to advise of the existence of footage from Animals Australia, rumours of which were circulating within the industry, and had made it clear that it showed cruelty worse than documented at Basateen abattoir in Egypt in 2006 (when Peter McGauran, Minister for Agriculture under the Howard government, suspended the Egyptian trade). She now spelt out the RSPCA's expectation that the trade to Indonesia should be halted and that Australian cattle already in Indonesia should go to the facilities with stunning. Whilst the advisor noted our concerns, the minister's office did not request a further briefing.

Frustrated with Ludwig's lack of response, we wrote to Prime Minister Gillard asking for a meeting to discuss the government's plan for the future of the trade. Our request was passed on to Ludwig but his office emailed back in early May, saying he was *unable to schedule a meeting at this point in time*. Just before this, a letter had arrived from Ludwig. It was not, as we might have hoped, a response to recent developments but to our meeting back in November, some six months earlier. Again, there was the assurance that industry would take care of any problems while the government would focus on improving trade conditions *for the benefit of both the live cattle and beef industries*.

The industry was definitely trying to take care of problems—that is, the publicity they would cause—because by this time they were well aware that *Four Corners* was filming in Indonesia. At the same time the minister was writing to us, the MLA was contacting Indonesian abattoirs, advising them that:

The Indonesian industry is under great threat from animal welfare groups

in Australia who wish to stop live cattle being exported to Indonesia... Currently there is a film crew in Indonesia preparing a story focusing on animal welfare which will be shown on national TV in Australia later in May. This will put great pressure on the Australian Government to stop the trade.

By the end of May, the political temperature around the live cattle trade to Indonesia had increased perceptibly as concern over what was about to be exposed spread through the industry and, no doubt, inside the minister's office. In the week before the *Four Corners* program was due to be aired, Ludwig responded to questions in Senate Estimates about the Indonesian trade by stating that he was not happy with the industry's rate of change. He said the industry *had been slow to date* in improving animal welfare, and that the plan they had released in response to his request for an improvement in welfare outcomes in Indonesia was *not a plan that I would endorse*.

In the final week of filming the *Four Corners* team requested an interview with Ludwig. This was their normal approach when an issue covered in a program has high-level political ramifications. He declined. On May 25 we wrote to him again, setting out the course of events since February and explaining that, in our view, the extent of the cruelty documented meant that the only course of action was for the government to halt the trade to Indonesia and assist producers to ensure all animals destined for export could instead be slaughtered in Australia. We also asked for the opportunity to brief him in person. As we moved rapidly through the final days before *Four Corners* aired, it became clear he had no intention of meeting us.

At 9.00pm on Sunday the 29th of May, the night before *A Bloody Business* was to go to air, Heather had a phone call from Ludwig's Chief of Staff, Michael Carey, asking to be given Lyn's footage from Indonesia. Somehow, the penny had at last dropped that this issue could not be left to the industry. The next day we visited the minister's office but he did not attend the meeting. We handed over a DVD of footage from Indonesia edited to show the scope of the problems there, on the condition it was not to be provided to the industry. (We did not know which

scenes had been chosen for screening by *Four Corners*.) We gave Carey a copy of my scientific report which, as we talked, I left lying open on the table at some of the worst pictures of abuse, and handed over a letter which called for an immediate halt to the export of cattle to Indonesia and an end-date for phasing out live exports.

15. RISKS OF THE TRADE

Setting aside pressure from animal welfare organisations, farming for live export suffers from a number of intrinsic problems. Agriculture is a notoriously unpredictable industry and the raising of cattle for export in the north of Australia has been more vulnerable than most aspects of primary production. This comes at an inevitable cost to the cattle involved, with high rates of breeder and calf mortality, especially in times of drought. As we have already mentioned, in this region cattle farming is often on marginal land where the environmental sustainability of agriculture is highly questionable. In Western Australia, annual reports from the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation have repeatedly stated that rangeland degradation is ongoing on many leases, leading to serious and irreversible transitions in soil and vegetation conditions. The authors of the 2013 report did not mince their words: *that such transitions are being recorded is particularly worrying and indicative of totally inappropriate livestock management throughout much of pastoral WA... action to address this situation will not be simple, but it is necessary and should be immediate.*

Yet immediate action has not been taken. Altering the land management practices of pastoralists over millions of hectares requires a long-term outlook and courageous decision-making—rare qualities in today’s political climate. Well-managed agricultural policy would evaluate environmental impacts and regulate proper land use across the whole nation rather than allowing expediency to dictate results.

Quite apart from environmental degradation and inevitable problems like drought and flood, the development of the live export trade has gone ahead despite equally clear warnings of considerable insecurity in export markets. Until the recent expansive push into further countries such as Vietnam, the northern cattle industry has relied for two decades largely on one market, Indonesia, despite its past volatility. Feedlots had already been built in Sumatra by the early 1990s, and 330,000 head of cattle imported there by 1997 when the Asian financial crisis hit. The market collapsed and demand did not pick up again until 1999.

Subsequently an Australian-Indonesian partnership developed that guaranteed a supply of Australian cattle, funded the expansion of feed-lots with investment of Australian capital, and thus further entrenched the trade.

This expansion and eventual reliance on Indonesia continued blindly despite the government of that country announcing its intention that domestic production would become self-sufficient. In 2009, the Jakarta Globe reported: *Specific credit subsidies have been introduced to reduce Indonesia's dependence on cattle and beef imports, with the objective of moving from 60 to 90 per cent self-sufficient by 2014.* While this aim has not been achieved yet, indeed was always unlikely in the projected time-frame, the industry has been clearly aware that quotas and weight limits for individual animals were likely to be reduced. Indonesia is a market where government intentions and reactions have been and remain inconsistent. In January 2015 the Indonesian government announced a new quota of 98,000 cattle for the first quarter of 2015, down 30% on the same period for the previous year, reasserting attempts to reach self-sufficiency in meat production. Ashley James, from live exporter Frontier International, was quoted by ABC Rural News as saying the annual total would drop from 700,000 in 2014 to 400,000 in 2015, at most. Yet in July 2015, when Indonesia reduced its third-quarter quota to only 50,000 head, this was met with shock and surprise in the media, with Minister for Agriculture Barnaby Joyce and ALEC's Alison Penfold acknowledging the volatility of the Indonesian market and blaming the decision on Indonesian internal politics.

An economic pragmatist would argue that our northern export industry is structurally insecure and living on borrowed time. Instead of accepting this reality, the industry has sought further, more distant, Asian markets, irresponsibly requiring longer sea voyages to more sovereign countries where standards of slaughter cannot be controlled by Australia.

While farmers have the right to make a fair living, it is also reasonable to expect them to make sensible long-term decisions. It is a central argument of this book that when weighing up opportunities, producers

need to take into account business hazards in tandem with ethical considerations. Unfortunately, like so many issues in the real world, the evidence required to weigh up this situation is shrouded in contradictory arguments. Although it commands so high a proportion of Australia's animal protein exports, the meat trade is seen to suffer limitations. The lack of abattoirs in the north is cited as a basic impediment because many producers there have no option other than live export. The establishment of new abattoirs is hampered by distance from infrastructure, the lack and high cost of labour in a remote region and the seasonality of turnoff. In fact, superficially at least, it is cheaper to kill Australian animals in Indonesia than in Australia. In the Middle East, there are higher tariffs on imported meat than on living animals, another imbalance that skews the market. These impediments make it easier for the industry to argue for the status quo and for government to avoid the deeper issues.

In stark contrast to Australia, New Zealand has turned its back on the live trade for slaughter. In 2007, the Clark government decided to have nothing more to do with it, only continuing to allow the export of animals for breeding. In June 2011, in an interview on ABC radio, former New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, Jim Anderton, explained why his country shut down the trade. *The local industry, he said, has come to the conclusion that the game isn't worth the scandal.* He added that New Zealand had a substantial international reputation for animal welfare to protect. The decision to ban live exports was a *combination of concern for animal welfare* and for the risk of economic backlash if New Zealand's reputation was harmed. The prohibition order was made to address the *need to have every element of the chain sewn up to standards we approve.*

We were putting at risk our major high-value technologically-improved processing of meat and dairy products. New Zealand is now deliberately in the area of high value-added exports of chilled meat on supermarket shelves in Europe and Japan and processed meats into Indonesia and Malaysia and wouldn't want to turn back the clock. Live animals are low commodity exports... all you can describe them as is appallingly bad... and you are

exporting jobs at the same time.

The practice of raising animals specifically to be shipped to another country thousands of kilometres away for slaughter seems to be an Australian speciality. Its entrenched nature and negative effect on the viability of meat processing in northern Australia makes it impossible to reverse without government support for alternative arrangements. Intrinsic to the situation is the fact that the live trade helps suppress further expansion of meat exports. The New Zealand example shows that the relatively high costs caused by our high standards for meat processing infrastructure and wages can be offset by returns from premium markets and gains in reputation. More importantly, the Australian public demands the animals they eat are treated well.

The situation is similar in Europe, a major customer for our chilled meat, where high expectations for welfare also influence our standards for slaughter. But in the countries where we export live animals, animal welfare has low social and political priority, allowing our exporters to cut costs. Our attempts to improve standards in these countries have been hamstrung by the lack of similar values there. Ironically, the Abbott government placed intense emphasis on enhancing the trade and improving returns for our producers while cutting funding to improving welfare in these countries. That, soon after gaining office, it systematically shut down its various animal welfare committees, as well as the very section of the Department of Agriculture that advised it on these matters, is indicative of how meaningless its claims about the importance of animal welfare had become. This decision was not justifiable on cost-saving grounds as most of the experts on these panels provided their services gratis, and incidental costs were minor. The government defended the axing on the basis that advice from the relevant section of the Department of Agriculture was adequate to its needs. Then, with astonishing speed and brazenness, it disbanded the Animal Welfare Branch of the department, leaving our national government with absolutely no considered, researched advice on this aspect of its role. The Turnbull administration has as yet done nothing to reverse these decisions.

The New Zealand example also encompasses the issue of value-adding and job creation. Pursuing the easiest option does not make long-term economic sense, and it is important that governments look beyond such convenience. Creating jobs here that support the industry, jobs that supply a large broad-based market, offers far better security.

While exports of live sheep varied between 1990 and 2013, exports of sheep meat increased by more than 150 per cent, according to the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics and Science (ABARES). In fact, over the last decade, live sheep exports have trended downwards. Meat is exported to over one hundred countries, while live exports rely on a small number of relatively unstable markets. Some 200,000 people are employed in the red meat industry in this country while, by generous estimate, only 13,000 are employed in live exports. Furthermore, live exports and meat processors compete for animals, as seen with cattle in the closure of northern abattoirs. Current decline in the national sheep flock will only increase this counterproductive competition.

As if further evidence were needed of the relative value of these industries, in 2014–15 the chilled meat trade was worth approximately \$11.65 billion while live exports were worth \$1.61 billion. The prediction from ABARES is for this gap to widen in the long term: *The potential to substitute imported meat for live imports has increased in many of Australia's export markets in recent years... lack of refrigeration is not a significant problem in the Middle East. In Southeast Asia: ...the rise in meat imports since the early 2000s is a reflection of rising incomes in the region, increasing urbanisation, changing consumer preferences and the increased availability of affordable imported meat.* It is true that cattle farming in the south—a far larger segment of producers than in the north—is better adapted to the chilled and frozen meat market. The infrastructure for meat exports is already well established in the south, and the travel distances to live export markets greater. But, when reputation and welfare are added to the equation, the imperative for continued realignment is obvious.

In this context, the animal welfare movement's consistent and evidence-backed argument is that live exports are bad for livestock and unreliable for producers. We also argue that a well-planned meat sector,

with strategically placed abattoirs catering for slaughter with prior stunning compatible with religious practices, and supported by effective trade diplomacy, can successfully replace the live trade. Despite some structural problems, we believe this should be achievable if there is the will to do so through forward-thinking government policy and industry investment.

Unfortunately government has not found that will. This is not completely true of industry. The Australian Agricultural Company (AACo), which both raises cattle and exports them on a large scale, has recently built an abattoir in Darwin to take its older cows, ex-breeders, for the chilled and frozen beef trade. This went ahead without any federal or territory government support, with AACo having to build basic infrastructure such as roads and other services to the facility. While former federal governments have failed to encourage such infrastructure, the Coalition government's support for expanding live export markets, combined with the lack of financial support for development like AACo's, further skews priorities.

That the Darwin AACo abattoir was built at all is an indication that at least a partial transition from live exports is already possible in the north. Admittedly, the facility will be relatively immune to sudden increases in live export prices that can threaten supply of stock to independent abattoirs. AACo, with control across all its processes, will be able to guarantee consistent supply. This only shows how important transition is. With a declining export trade, the problem of supply would be alleviated. The real issue here is, indeed, the required act of will from the federal government. If it offered even basic incentives for the establishment of adequate abattoirs in the north, while legislating for humane standards for shipping animals overseas, then a transition to a meat-only trade would become a very realistic proposition.

I have already described how it felt, gathered together with my colleagues on the night *A Bloody Business* went to air, my sense of anticipation and anxiety intense even though I had some sense of what the program would contain. What needs to be emphasised, is how unaware we all were of the shape and detail of what would be shown. Certainly, the *Four Corners* team had continued to discuss those sections of the footage they were likely to show, verify facts, and ask questions, including people in the industry they might interview (after all, journalists coming to a story often know little about its background or the various players involved), but I was essentially on the outside of the process. Sarah Ferguson, Michael Doyle and their crew had travelled to the Northern Territory and to Indonesia, conducted many interviews and built their own picture of the issue. None of this had been shared with us. As the theme music ended and Kerry O'Brien began his introduction, I started to understand the dimensions of what would follow:

Tonight we present a program that will shock you. Some people are bound to find parts of it difficult to watch, as indeed I did. But this is a story that demands to be seen and heard. We're shining the spotlight tonight on the live cattle trade to Indonesia because, without doubt, very large numbers of Australian cattle exported there have been subjected to gross, horrible abuse.

I knew all too well that large numbers of our cattle had suffered gross abuse but now the Australian public were being told this without evasion. When you work for years on an issue where denial and equivocation have constantly to be countered, it is extraordinary to hear this stripped away. As the program began to unfold, the momentousness of showing scene after scene of cruelty inflicted by Australian-trained slaughtermen using Australian-installed restraint boxes was being made increasingly clear. The *Four Corners* investigation corroborated and developed Lyn's evidence, going to several of the ten abattoirs she had visited as well as others she hadn't. Before their departure, though, Ferguson and her team had already interviewed several Industry spokespeople, and word had got back to some sites in Indonesia. At Medan, where standards

of slaughter were at their most appalling, the *Four Corners* crew was refused entry. During *A Bloody Business*, Ferguson's voice-over for Lyn's footage from Medan used the word *torture*, without any hyperbole, to describe the horrible, prolonged slaughter of one steer. These scenes were so serious, they had to be included in the program although we were concerned that their very extremity might cause them to be dismissed as an isolated event, and thereby distract attention from the entrenched malpractices seen everywhere. As I watched, I was relieved to see that Medan's horrors were indeed balanced by detailed coverage of footage of the problems that occurred throughout the slaughterhouses Lyn had visited. The fundamental failure of the Mark 1 box, and the cruelty that was intrinsic to its use—the tripping, head slapping, the repeated attempts of many animals to stand after falling, sometimes even after having their throats cut, and the prolonged times from slaughter to death—were shown in full clarity.

Following *Four Corners*, the fate of the steer at Medan did become a focus of attention simply because it was so gruellingly inhumane. The extracts shown on the program were almost impossible to watch, but they were but a part of the 28 minutes of purgatory endured by that animal before it eventually died. Witnessing this torture has haunted Lyn ever since. Even writing about it now—I haven't described the fate of this animal elsewhere in the book—brings the images very starkly back into my mind. In the attempt to control the steer, he was jabbed repeatedly with a stick and, after falling and breaking a rear leg, was poked many times in the face. His tail was bent, pulled and twisted and eventually broken. His face was slapped, his eyes and nose gouged with a finger over and over, water was hosed in his face and up his nose, and he was kicked repeatedly in the head, dragged and, at last, stabbed in the neck before being hacked there with twenty-three movements of what must have been a very blunt knife.

It had seemed to me as I watched *A Bloody Business* that the thoroughness and balance of the program would overcome any possible claims of selective or doctored evidence. I did not foresee the full extent of the backlash that would occur, a reaction that grew slowly through

time. So thorough was their approach, the film crew had visited one abattoir in Indonesia where stunning was the norm, the Santori facility already mentioned, indicating that humane practices were possible (a scene that many critics of the program failed to acknowledge). But also highlighted was the way in which proper practices were repeatedly ignored or, indeed, made impossible by the equipment our own agencies had installed in numerous slaughterhouses.

Throughout the program, interviews with key figures in the trade were included. Some of these revealed the shock producers themselves felt at the Indonesian revelations. Ferguson spoke to Rohan Sullivan, President of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, himself also a supplier of cattle to Indonesia:

Sullivan: *We need to be moving towards stunning as, as the, as our ultimate goal, but recognising that there are some, there are... well it's going to take time and that we need to be, we need to be a bit patient about it because there's lots of reasons why stunning is not going to be taken up straight away.*

Ferguson: *You say we've got to have patience but why should the animals suffer while we help Indonesia get its act together on stunning?*

Sullivan: *Because I think that um... (Long pause).*

Ferguson: *It's a tough question isn't it?*

Sullivan: *Yes, it is.*

When Ken Warriner, a long-term, large-scale producer, was described the scenes of cruelty in Medan he commented:

I think it's the most shocking thing I've heard for a long time. We will get to the bottom of that and if those people are still employed in that abattoir we will never ever, ever, ever put cattle into that abattoir. I'd close Medan before we'd let that happen again.

Industry officials and spokespeople, by contrast, were much more guarded, as evidenced in the discussion with Cameron Hall, the CEO of Livecorp, about the continued supply of cattle to Gondrong slaughterhouse. The program showed Ferguson talking to me as we looked at footage, then to Cameron Hall:

Ferguson: *Despite all the Australian training at Gondrong, many*

animals were still alive minutes after the throat cut. According to international rules on slaughter, they should be dead within 30 seconds.

Jones: This one goes on for, for about three minutes. Exactly what he's experiencing we don't know but there's a very, very high likelihood that this is incredibly painful. If this animal is still conscious this should not be happening.

Ferguson: Why not stop Australian animals going to the Gondrong abattoir?

Hall: Look, in the Gondrong abattoir what we saw was poor handling, poor practices. Now we know...

Ferguson: So you're happy, you're happy at Gondrong for animals to smash their heads on the concrete tonight, tomorrow night, the night after?

Hall: We know that where the infrastructure that we put in place is used according to its design and where the training that we provide is fully adopted but the...

Ferguson: Let me just repeat that question. You're happy for animals at Gondrong to smash their heads on the concrete tonight, tomorrow night, the night after?

Hall: We, we know that poor practices have to be improved and that's what we are working hard in the marketplace to do.

Then there came this extract from an interview with Ivan Caple, which shows his attempt to minimise any inference of malpractice:

Caple: The reactions of the cattle told me that they weren't being abused—and cattle don't lie... The welfare generally in Indonesia, our team was unanimous in saying generally the welfare conditions for Australian cattle in Indonesia is good.

Ferguson: The expert team also visited Gondrong.

Caple: They were to [sic] the most proficient we saw using the control box. It was quite unbelievable how proficient they were.

Ferguson: Were there any head slaps in Gondrong?

Caple: There were some, yeah. There were some.

Ferguson: How does that square with efficient?

Caple: Ah well, it doesn't really slow the process all that, that much because the slaughtermen can usually restrain the animal quite quickly to prevent the

slapping.

Ferguson: *Doesn't it hurt though?*

Caple: *Ah, I don't know.*

Ferguson: *The report did say there were instances of poor animal welfare in the abattoirs.*

Caple: *A couple of the handlers were a little bit exuberant with the use of a goad and a very long pointy stick. Sometimes a finger was in an eye socket. That's not required. All of those issues can be picked up by a trainer.*

Watching as the full dimensions of our trade to Indonesia were encapsulated on the screen before us—the scale of cruelty, the shocked response of key players, and then the failure of many among them to comprehend how far this had gone beyond the possibility of damage control—I felt both exhilarated and daunted. Now that the core work of getting the investigation into the open air was done, there was some sense of how gruelling would be the ongoing task of pushing industry and, most importantly, government to act. I had some sense of what was to come, but very far from a full one.

17. THE INDUSTRY CASE

The case for continuing and expanding live exports is primarily an economic one, but examining the ethical dimension that might underpin it is important and instructive, if sometimes bemusing. However flawed some of these arguments might be, the animal welfare movement, like any force attempting to shift social values, has an obligation to consider them as well as any negative effects of its own demands. The intensity of the conflict over the trade is indicative of what is at stake financially, but it may also be as much about a staking out of values that are just as difficult to reconcile. Some of the arguments industry has put forward can be dismissed as opportunistic, others as deeply, even reasonably, held.

Turning first to what can be well substantiated in the case for the industry, the one compelling argument is that farmers' livelihoods are at risk. There is a real ethical dimension here, one that considers the way of life and economic survival of the people who grow livestock. This is an emotionally powerful issue and one that has to be taken seriously. Farming animals is so long an established part of our society that a substantial proportion of our population is deeply dependent on it and the way of life that goes with it. That live animal exports have been allowed to develop has, by default, made the trade part of that system. We have seen how, through a failure to consider welfare during the piecemeal expansion of the trade, cruelty became built into its systems. Now that ethical considerations are catching up with economic ones, producers are caught in the change. While they cannot avoid all responsibility for the decisions they have made or the fate of their livestock, a society which eventually demands new standards from its citizens has a responsibility to support their adjustment to such change. That government and industry bodies failed to protect farmers properly by allowing live exports to be carried out inhumanely further underlines this responsibility. While it's reasonable to argue that producers should have questioned whether their livestock were subject to inbuilt mistreatment, it is also important to remember that their attitude to the trade itself did reflect prevalent values. More salient is the fact that they were not

present overseas and, through the levies they paid, entrusted their peak bodies to oversee the handling of their animals. While there was an imperative to suspend the trade, the decision came as a relatively unforeseen blow to many producers. According to an ABARES survey of northern cattle producers conducted just after the suspension ended, approximately 375,000 cattle being prepared for export were blocked from departing, with consequent loss of income. This claim is considerably higher than the approximately 67,000 cattle that would normally have been exported in five weeks had the suspension not been put in place. As well, it was claimed that some 300 workers lost job time in the immediate aftermath of the suspension. Industry and some farmers argued that due consideration was not given to these repercussions. The ABARES survey also found that less than 40 per cent of farmers were actively seeking alternative markets for their cattle—instead they were waiting for exports to resume. By September the trade was back up to over 51,000 animals in the month. In the end, cattle exports to Indonesia for June–December 2011 were down only 110,209 head compared with 2010 figures.

Another complaint was that there was no real consultation by the federal government with state and territory governments before the suspension. This suggests Minister Ludwig, under enormous public pressure to act, should have held off making a decision when, in fact, state governments have no oversight of the trade, and any perceived need to consult was as much political as was the pressure to close exports down. Spokespeople for the industry have claimed, as Prime Minister Abbott did, that the minister was swayed unreasonably by a pressure group, and was panicked into the suspension. This view asserts that Ludwig's sudden and almost unprecedented reaction caused unreasonable harm to producers who had no time or means to prepare any alternative for the resulting sudden loss of market. The argument goes, despite a lack of evidence, that the suspension then had wider ramifications because the glut of cattle lowered prices generally and caught up farmers further south in a mess in no way of their making.

At the time, the Gillard government did offer compensation to

anyone affected, through a \$3 million income recovery subsidy scheme and a \$30 million assistance package for producers and related businesses affected by the suspension. Compensation included help with immediate costs such as additional transport, subsidised interest rates on new loans (up to \$300,000), grants (up to \$20,000) and access to financial planning advice. The package was described as being a *drop in the ocean* by industry. It's worth considering exactly how much need there was for compensation. While the effects on producers directly caught up in the suspension is undeniable, according to 2013 government survey data, only twelve per cent of cattle producers in northern Australia derived more than half their cattle-based income from live exports.

While these arguments have validity as an important dimension of the ethics of stopping the trade, it can reasonably be argued that, in the case of the northern producers who largely supply Indonesia, the social contract is mitigated to some extent. The export trade is supplied by a relatively small number of players, mostly large concerns, who should have had the perspective to make sound commercial decisions and who should have shied away from dependency on such an unreliable, scandal-ridden business model. As has already been shown, one of the central arguments in the animal welfare case is that the northern cattle industry has not planned well but instead simply responded to short-term opportunities without ethical reflection. Good business practice examines all the factors relevant to its chances of success, in the process dismissing vulnerable options and building in solutions that solve structural problems. One of those basic factors is, and must be, animal welfare. Furthermore, the reputational arguments against the trade, and for the alternative of chilled or frozen meat, augment the welfare ones. If southern producers were affected as a consequence of these bad commercial and ethical decisions (and, again, there is little evidence to support this), it was unfortunate, but this should be sheeted home to the failed system, not to animal welfare organisations that long and consistently warned of those system failures.

This brings us to a discussion of what we consider to be the industry's more flawed defences. The most often cited of these is that we improve

practices in overseas markets by being present there. If we were to extend this logic further, we would argue that Australia should export the most animals to those countries with the worst welfare standards in order to bring them up to scratch. Arguments of convenience like this often prove absurd when examined logically. The live export industry is prone to such arguments because of pressure to offer more than economic justification for its existence. This, in itself, shows how far the debate has shifted. In consequence, the rhetoric of advocates for the trade has also shifted, attempting to recast the industry as an agent for positive change in countries with lower standards of welfare than ours. Such advocates argue that an enormous effort to improve the situation has been made, and that carping welfare organisations fail to recognise these efforts and the successes they have achieved. It has to be acknowledged that some real improvements have occurred. Stunning equipment is now used in the majority of abattoirs in Indonesia slaughtering Australian cattle, and a system of supply chain security has been widely instituted. (This system, known as ESCAS, will be examined in a later chapter.) Industry-led training programs have been run in Indonesia and other markets to make workers aware of the new requirements. Undoubtedly some players are determined to do better and have achieved considerable gains. Unfortunately, because these changes have only occurred when the pressure to act has become unavoidable, it is hard to avoid scepticism that they arise less from a concern for animal welfare than a determination to safeguard their business. While it might be argued that any positive change is good, regardless of its cause, the reality remains that it has been built on an intrinsically flawed, inhumane model. The analogy of putting lipstick on a pig may be too flippant, but the fact remains that despite incremental reforms, animals are inevitably worse off being shipped and slaughtered beyond our jurisdiction. This is the irredeemable baseline that advocates of the trade conveniently ignore.

It is beyond question that live export companies secure contracts with importing countries on the basis that they will bring a healthy profit and will lead to ongoing consignments and returns. This may not rule out the implementation of improved practices but it is patently evident

that any investment in animal handling or processing infrastructure, or assistance with their design, is directly linked to the economics of securing market opportunities over the long-term. Australia's main markets can shift quickly and significantly, from established markets to new ones with no previous experience of Australian animals. One example is Vietnam, where cattle exports have rocketed from only 1,300 in 2011 to 358,000 by the third quarter of 2015, a shock increase due mainly to supply shortages within Vietnam and surrounding countries created by the sale of local cattle into China. Such market opportunities may require exporters to assist with the provision of infrastructure and training for handling Australian animals, but these matters are undertaken outside our jurisdiction and, as we have seen, always in the face of entrenched local values and methods. The push, of course, is to get our animals into these markets quickly, even though it is widely acknowledged that developing humane welfare practice is a long and complicated process and one that in a country like Vietnam inevitably remains beyond our full control. In the two years since the trade has escalated in the Vietnamese market, eighty-nine facilities began to receive and slaughter Australian cattle. Graphic evidence of steers being sledgehammered to death in backyard slaughterhouses in 2015 provide a stark and horrible reminder of the risks associated with such a rapid expansion in a country where traditional practices have yet to take account of animal suffering.

So while government and industry have claimed that real efforts are being made to improve welfare, and while some exporters may make such attempts, the trade's rapid expansion and overall scale makes proper control all but impossible. For instance, exporters have been quick to broadcast when abattoirs taking Australian cattle have been equipped with stunners, but ensuring such equipment is used effectively, or transferring this technology to local slaughter is another matter altogether. It's also worth noting that even when one line in an abattoir uses stunning, there can be another parallel line in the same facility that does not. Most importantly, the failure to ensure all Australian animals are slaughtered within approved facilities means their fate slips further beyond our control. The claim is also made that we have better shipping

standards than the rest of the world, but this is only because the few other countries that also export over such long distances, like Uruguay and Brazil, have no specific standards at all. And given that several of the same export companies service both the Australian and South American routes, if they were actually interested in improving welfare, it would be reasonable to expect they would voluntarily provide similar standards for all journeys. They do not.

In any case, unless improving practices in importing countries also directly affects the treatment of local animals, then suggesting the industry is improving animal welfare by being there is a non-argument. Even if overseas practices were improved to a level that matched Australian standards (and this is not a requirement of the current regulatory system), our animals would still be worse off than if they had been retained and slaughtered here. Training abattoir workers and supplying equipment to help other countries better handle and slaughter their own animals is a laudable outcome, but it does not require the export of Australian livestock. Sadly the few examples where such improvements have actually occurred are linked directly to market access for live exports. In 2011 the Gillard government reallocated \$10 million over four years from its foreign aid budget to fund the *Improved Animal Welfare Program*. This included funding for the OIE to employ a humane slaughter expert to deliver training in ‘eligible’ countries—a positive initiative, but countries were only eligible for such assistance if they were importing Australian livestock (not meat or other commodities). In 2014 as part of its Budget Review, the Abbott government cut the final \$2.3 million payment, ending the program a year early.

Another defence often made by the industry and its apologists argues that if we stopped exporting live animals, other countries would simply fill the void. By this logic, we would advise ourselves to do whatever ill we can, where we can, before someone else does. Again, this is an absurd argument that should find no oxygen in a society with any social conscience. It also fails to acknowledge that the key way to reduce the potential for other countries to replace live exports from Australia is to increase our meat trade. An increase in the proportion of livestock

slaughtered here would be a net improvement for welfare wherever the meat ended up. Commentators who assert other exporters with lower standards would replace us in Indonesia neglect to mention that both nations have foot-and-mouth disease-free status, while most other exporting countries do not, making their cattle unacceptable.

Unlike Indonesia, where the demand is for feeder cattle, the Vietnamese market is for slaughter-ready animals—a market that should be replaceable with chilled or frozen meat at the right price. But there is no profit for live export companies in such a transition and no advantage in their political friends pushing such a strategy. It is the economic arguments for the meat trade that naturally augment those for humane slaughter, rather than the live trade causing its implementation. And, inevitably, the transport of the animals live from one country to another for slaughter has no inherent justification at all.

Perhaps the central ethical premise advanced by supporters of the trade is that we have a responsibility to provide much-needed protein for developing countries like Indonesia. The moral imperative of exporting meat to the third world is played as though this trumps cruelty to the animals that provide that meat (when it is reasonable to insist we can only justify eating them if we minimise their suffering). International trade can and should be beneficial to both nations involved, but self-interest is always at the heart of any country's attempts to sell its products. Australian producers want foremost to sell their animals for the best price. Those Indonesians who eat Australian beef tend to be from the wealthier middle class (meat consumption and imports tend to rise as incomes rise), undermining the postured notion of providing animal protein to poverty-stricken Asians. In any case, the whole argument is made on the absurd basis that only living animals can provide protein to these markets, rather than meat or, indeed, plant protein (which is traditionally important in Asia). The trade in breeding animals sent to develop the herd in third world countries can be justified with this sort of argument, but not the trade in animals for slaughter. And, as already mentioned, the Indonesian government is attempting, over time, to become self-sufficient in beef production. Even our own aid program for

Indonesia has contributed, through a \$20 million collaborative research program, to the development of the local beef industry. It is ironic that our government has supported Indonesian self-sufficiency in this way while promulgating and supporting live exports into that market. This can be explained in terms of creating good relations with Indonesia so that we continue to be given access to a reasonable quota for the live trade, but it still begs the question of the fundamental vulnerability of that market, let alone the ethics of supplying it.

In the fallout from the suspension of the trade there have been some particularly curious arguments made in favour of the industry. It has been claimed, for instance, by some commentators that it is arrogant of Australia, an affluent, privileged country to dictate to our near neighbours how to run their importing systems when their priorities are for taking care of the more pressing needs of their people. This reversal of the responsibility for our mistakes makes compelling theatre, if only for its breath-taking hypocrisy. First we export our cattle along with an inhumane technology for their slaughter, and attempt to ignore our culpability for the situation. Then, when caught out, we claim the economic imperatives make it essential we continue the practice (with minor adjustments to appease the do-gooders). Finally, we claim it is arrogant to attempt any intervention because our developed status makes it inappropriate for us to pressure a developing country (when we, in any case, have no control over another sovereign nation). It is worth considering in this context that Indonesia, for instance, has no means of implementing or enforcing the limited animal welfare provisions in its legislation. While some laws were drafted there in 2009, none has yet been implemented. Rather than attempting to dictate to our trade partners, this is further evidence of why we should slaughter here where we can, and do, control standards.

Another somewhat strange argument, given a degree of cultural xenophobia in Australia about Islam, is that religious slaughter practices in Muslim countries necessitate and justify live exports on the grounds of cultural sensitivity. This is a distortion of the legal requirement in Australia that upholds the rights of religious groups provided they do

not clash with basic principles of law. That we defend freedom of religion does not equate with any obligation to suppress our own values, or laws, regarding animal welfare. Australian exporters may have the choice to adapt their products to meet the cultural sensitivities of importing countries, but, in fact, this is yet another economic argument dressed up as cultural sensitivity—that financially valuable markets should not be cut off simply because some buyers prefer to kill livestock on demand rather than purchase meat. It is true that during religious festivals such as the Haj and the Eid al-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) there has historically been a high demand for live animals—many thousands being slaughtered in the open street by people with no skill in the task. Indeed some Muslim communities prefer to slaughter animals themselves all year round, but this does not mean that Australia has any obligation to provide them with a continued source of livestock. And even in the heartland of Islam, the Middle East, meat that meets religious requirements can now be ordered ahead through special voucher systems. The MLA's own market forecasts have identified this change:

One of the key trends identified in the Middle East is the increasing popularity of western style supermarkets and hypermarkets in place of traditional markets, or souks. With this has come an increased demand for 'aspirational' goods, including quality foods. This places Australia in a favourable position relative to competitors from India, east Africa and, in some cases, local product. The consumer awareness of Australian lamb as a reliable, safe product is particularly important, and tighter country of origin labelling requirements should assist this further.

There is a huge demand across the Middle East for halal-certified meat, including during religious festivals. Australia's largest sheepmeat processor, Fletcher International Exports, which has an annual processing capacity of 4.5 million animals, ships 2.5 million lamb carcasses a year by air into the UAE, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. In 2014-15, the Middle East imported 121,000 tonnes of chilled Australian lamb and mutton—an increase of 500 per cent over the past fifteen years. The MLA has stated that the main limit on increasing exports to the Middle East is supply, along with strong demand from other

export markets such as China. Yet the Middle Eastern countries with this strong demand for prime Australian lamb are the very same ones our industry claims loudly have cultural sensitivities that require live animals.

Religion is used as a tool in another defence of the trade's failings. Australian abattoirs can apply for authorisation to slaughter animals without prior stunning for religious purposes. These exemptions to normal practice extend only to kosher slaughter (under Orthodox Jewish requirements) and a tiny minority of Australian Muslims who do not accept that pre-slaughter stunning meets halal requirements. Based on this, the live export industry has argued that it is not reasonable to demand stunning in our overseas markets when it is not universal at home. In practice, there is only a handful of abattoirs that kill animals in this way, accounting for less than one per cent of slaughter. None of them service the export market. An increase in anti-Islamic sentiment following the rise of ISIS has generated a deal of misinformation about halal slaughter in Australia which has muddied the waters even further. For the record, in Australia all halal-certified export abattoirs stun every animal prior to slaughter, just as they would if they were not halal-certified. Even so, there is considerable disquiet over the practice of religious slaughter when it is seen to run counter to good animal welfare, regardless of whether it occurs here or overseas. The real point remains that it is a spurious argument to focus on a small and specific exception from our standard practices in an attempt to justify large scale inhumane slaughter overseas.

Similarly, the fact that OIE recommendations do not mandate stunning is used to assert it is not a requirement Australia needs to insist on for our exported animals. If this international body says unstunned slaughter is acceptable, then what are we quibbling about? However this mistakenly assumes that 'international' equates to 'high' when it comes to standards. As already explained, they are the lowest common denominator standards achievable internationally. To claim that what we require for our animals at home is an unnecessary nicety when we send them elsewhere is as hollow as it is unethical.

When evaluating all the evidence offered in support of the trade, it is clear the industry has one strong ethical argument—the right to a livelihood for producers—that supports their case, but it is a case for adjustment to a new model, not continuation of the old. Farmers should be helped to make this change, not resist it. Ethical failure is everywhere else in this one aspect of their industry. Expediency on a grand scale is endemic where free markets follow the money—materials are regularly shipped by multinational companies from one country to another to reduce the costs of manufacturing or to increase the efficiency of one aspect of the supply chain, often with little regard for collateral consequences. Unfortunately this habit of expediency is also increasingly applied to animals. This raises major unavoidable questions for our nation and government—how willing are we to allow animals to be treated just like any other tradable commodity? Where should the limit be set, and at what cost to the wellbeing of these traded livestock? And, in consequence, what sort of a society do we want to become? This question, one asked at the start of this book, lies at the heart of defining who we are as a people.

18. THE MORNING AFTER

The response from the Australian public to *A Bloody Business* was immediate and nothing short of astounding. By the time the program ended our joint campaign website—*Ban Live Exports*—had crashed because of the deluge of people trying to register their support and take action.

First thing the next day, the activist group GetUp added the force of its supporter base to the campaign and launched what was to become its fastest-growing petition ever—collecting 260,000 signatures in three days and raising \$300,000 for campaign advertising. In the days after the program, emails were being sent to Prime Minister Julia Gillard at a rate of one a minute. Within a few weeks, 100,000 letters had been written to the Prime Minister and Minister Joe Ludwig.

The story was in the top five national media issues for the five weeks following the program; there were 28,000 radio stories, 13,000 TV mentions and 3,000 press stories, but this response was slower to get underway than that of the public. Indeed, Lisa Chalk had only one media call on the evening of the broadcast, from Melbourne radio station 3AW. She sat on the sofa in Heather Neil's living-room wondering if the press would even take up the issue. The next morning, though, she was called at about 4.30am by Channel Seven's Sunrise program. That commercial breakfast television wanted to do an interview was significant both for the take-up of the story generally, but was also indicative of how far awareness of animal welfare issues was gaining ground in public consciousness.

In those following days, when the story seemed to be in every news broadcast, Lyn and I, as the main spokespeople for Animals Australia and the RSPCA, were called on to give back-to-back interviews. Both of us being away from home, we shared an apartment in Canberra where we slept, briefly, and began work early. The first morning after *Four Corners*, the radio interviews started at 5.00 am. Lyn's appearance on Sunrise soon after was her very first live TV interview. Between interviews we watched snippets of ABC breakfast television, and when David Inall, CEO of the Cattle Council, appeared being interviewed by

Virginia Trioli, and said he had never seen cruelty like that shown on *Four Corners*, I sent a tweet to the show saying that he had worked in Indonesia and knew exactly what conditions were like in abattoirs there. Trioli read it out.

So began one of the most intense days I've ever experienced, a day when it appeared that the live trade was under such pressure it might indeed be ended. The intensity didn't ease off until after 10pm, when both Lyn and I were interviewed live on ABC24's *The World*. The momentum that developed through the day's media coverage encouraged investigative and political journalists to begin asking searching questions that greatly increased the heat on government and industry.

Still during that first day, between bouts of interviews Lyn and I, along with Heather and Glenys Oogjes, went to a hastily arranged meeting with officials from the Department of Agriculture, including Deputy Secretary Philip Glyde and Dr Andy Carroll, Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer. The department at last had to face the issue because the minister had ordered an investigation. We provided all our evidence and I also arranged a meeting with Andy Carroll for the following day. It was essential to ensure he had all the information necessary to commence his review of the Mark 1 and Mark 4 restraint boxes.

Late that afternoon, we addressed the Coalition's Rural and Regional Affairs Committee and answered questions for almost an hour and a half in a room overlooking one of Parliament House's neatly tended courtyards, a stark contrast with the subject of the discussions. That such a committee requested the meeting is evidence of how seriously the situation was being taken even by the conservative side of politics, and not solely in terms of damage control for a part of its constituency. All thirteen committee members, which included Barnaby Joyce, Bill Heffernan, Warren Truss and Albie Schultz (who had once been an abattoir worker), expressed abhorrence for the treatment of cattle revealed by *A Bloody Business*, even if they found fault with our tactics in fighting the problem. Barnaby Joyce proved aggressive. While he had expressed how distraught he was at what he had seen on *Four Corners*, he was also outraged that we had taken the footage to the media rather than to the

Coalition. In fact, we had briefed Liberal Senator Helen Coonan about the situation in Indonesia, but she had been unable to garner support from her colleagues.

After meeting the committee it was back to interviews, Lisa organising the stream of media requests. In fact, most of the next week was spent at Parliament House where we were so continually on the phone that I remember Lisa sitting on the floor in a corridor where there was a spare power point, charging my phone while I talked on hers. Meanwhile, our aim was to speak to as many MPs as possible, and get as many as we could on side. As we walked the long corridors of Parliament House, Heather was bailing up politicians and their staff—Joe Hockey in the lift, Mike Kelly on the stairs, Tony Abbott’s press secretary in the cafeteria, Warren Truss here, Tanya Plibersek there—wherever she met them, asking them to face the enormity of the issue. Heather is a natural at striking up a conversation, but I’m not, and during campaigning I found myself in many situations where I had to overcome this limitation. Our strategy was simply one of persistence—the government wanted the issue out of the media spotlight—we wanted to keep it there for as long as possible. So we kept bothering people, kept commenting, and kept up the pressure.

And people were responding. In *Aussies*, the Parliament House Café, people came up to congratulate us on what we were achieving. A number of times, politicians who had never met Lyn before asked if they could hug her for her work exposing the industry. That they all knew who we were was strange enough, but it was an even more bizarre experience to see yourself on the *Aussies*’ TV screen only moments after walking back from being filmed in the courtyard outside.

The intensity was such that, at Minister Ludwig’s press conference towards the end of the first day following *Four Corners*, I was fired up so far that, with uncharacteristic daring, I intervened to probe the minister with a question. Heather later told me she had to duck the bank of cameras which swung around to film me as I began to speak. At the end of the press conference Heather and Lyn walked out at the same time as Ludwig with the media pack following—a photo of the three of them

talking appeared across the press the following day.

On the second day after *A Bloody Business* I met with Andy Carroll in his office where I detailed for him my analysis of the Indonesian footage and of the inherent problems with the Mark 1 box. The meeting was a constructive one. Carroll clearly engaged with the information I gave him and thanked me for the openness and thoroughness of the briefing. I left the meeting believing he would examine the evidence without prejudice. (This was a relief. In the late 1990s he had been the departmental official in charge of introducing the widely-criticised program of third-party veterinarians to replace government vets who accompanied some live export shipments. The program offloaded direct responsibility for veterinary oversight to the industry, a decision that led to poorer standards and was subsequently partially reviewed.) Unfortunately, a few days after our meeting it was announced that Carroll had gone on sick leave, which was extended until he resigned, leaving a vacuum of senior advice to government at so pivotal a time.

That day we also met with advisers for Prime Minister Gillard and Kevin Rudd, who was then Minister for Foreign Affairs. Although there was an overwhelming sense that pressure was continuing to build on our politicians, we were disappointed to be assigned only a junior advisor to the PM and, for want of an empty room, were forced to have our discussion on a sofa in the corridor. This was not a matter of offended pride, only an indication that the issue was being marginalised. Considering this, it is salient to remember that a ship loaded with Australian cattle left Darwin for Indonesia that same night. Three more were due to sail from Western Australia over the next couple of days.

Back at the apartment in Kingston each night, living on Thai take-away and red wine, Lyn and I tried to catch up with work as well as plan for the next day. Despite the chill of early winter, every so often one of us would duck outside to the balcony for a radio interview on the phone—until we realised that many of the apartments surrounding us were occupied by politicians or their staffers.

As pressure for change went on growing over the following few days—the mass of correspondence from the public continued to build,

further funding for advertising from GetUp followers was given, press coverage grew to include more overseas interest, including interviews with *The Guardian* in the UK and *CNN*—those of us involved in the daily hurly-burly began to believe this force was unstoppable. We became caught up in the momentum of events. Lyn, who is sustained by an unshakeable optimism about her work, believed the trade would be ended within weeks. Generally less confident about our political processes, I was anxious that the government lacked the nerve to act at all, but began to believe that some sort of change was inevitable. Really, none of us could believe that having seen the evidence of what was happening in Indonesia—and it was still happening day by day—anyone could allow it to continue. In fairness to our perspective, the backlash against the campaign we were expecting had barely surfaced. Many producers were outraged by the evidence from Indonesia, and other parts of the industry were distancing themselves, particularly the meat processors who, since *A Bloody Business*, had reiterated the damage to investment and jobs the live trade was doing to their businesses.

We were even given hope by some politicians who were usually advocates for the trade. On the 2nd of June, the third day after *Four Corners*, we bumped into Dr Chris Back, a veterinarian and senator from Western Australia, in a corridor of Parliament House. Over previous months we'd developed a database of where politicians stood on the issue, and although we'd been giving out our information packs and talking to anyone we could over the previous few days, Back was low on our list because of his clearly enunciated strong pro-trade position. Now he asked for a meeting, and Heather, Lyn and I went to his office. Back questioned, as did a number of other Coalition members, why we had gone to the press with our evidence instead of to the opposition. It is a reflexive reaction that politicians generally don't like the media controlling events they see as their province, but the question itself was, nonetheless, not unreasonable. For over an hour we explained how both the RSPCA and Animals Australia had repeatedly alerted the minister, the department and industry to our concerns about Indonesian practices. With such overwhelming evidence being met with such

profound intransigence we felt we had to go decisively beyond lobbying politicians and their advisers. Back leaned back in his chair and told us he understood, that we had no choice but to do what we had done.

While we had shared our concerns with Senator Coonan, the unspoken factor here was that we hadn't approached the opposition as much as government for two reasons. Not only did it have no real ability to change national policy, its sympathies were tied so closely to industry we knew any information would almost certainly be taken to its peak bodies, undermining the impact we felt we had no choice but to maximise. It has to be remembered how clearly we had come to believe that this was the only means left to us to achieve real change.

That Ludwig postponed a meeting with us over this period only persuaded us of the pressure he was under. Immediately following the broadcast, just as we scrambled into campaign mode, the minister's office had also been busy ensuring they released a response to the program as soon as possible. At eleven minutes past ten, less than an hour after the program ended, a statement from Ludwig was emailed to media contacts. As expected, he was *shocked by the footage and the treatment of the animals involved* and had ordered an immediate investigation, including asking his department to provide *all available options in response to the evidence*. He added that he had directed the department to implement a moratorium on the installation of any new Mark 1 restraint boxes, and to review the ongoing appropriateness of Mark 1 and Mark 4 boxes. But it was the last section of his statement that brought us the most hope:

Finally, I have requested a thorough briefing on all of the legislative and regulatory responses available to me for responding to evidence of animal mistreatment, including the banning of trade to specific facilities or destinations... It is clear that industry reforms to animal welfare standards have not gone far enough or been fast enough and much more needs to be done.

So, as the hours went by, we believed he was embroiled in deciding exactly what to do. Rather than an outright ban, we thought his likely immediate reaction would be to impose some sort of limitation on those slaughterhouses the industry could continue to export to. As we'd seen

before *Four Corners*, the industry itself had instigated this at three abattoirs in order to ward-off greater sanctions. This was indeed his next move. On 31 May, the minister issued what appeared to be a hastily prepared media release, stating that he had *asked for orders to be prepared that enforce the complete suspension of live animal exports to the facilities identified by the evidence gained by Animals Australia*. It went on: *Further, I will appoint an independent reviewer to investigate the complete supply chain for live exports up to and including the point of slaughter. I reserve the right to add further facilities to the banned list, if required.*

On the 2nd of June, Ludwig was interviewed on ABC radio's *AM* and, extraordinarily, asked for evidence of any cruelty in Indonesian slaughterhouses. We wrote him a letter the same day, going through everything he should already have known from my report and Lyn's footage. Our letter argued that because the abattoirs she filmed had been chosen totally at random and they all had shown inhumane practices, no other facility could be trusted:

Unless you have been provided with reliable and independently validated evidence that a slaughterhouse in Indonesia meets internationally accepted slaughter standards, then it can only be concluded that they do not, and therefore that the treatment endured by Australian cattle in any Indonesian slaughterhouse will be no different than that documented during the Animals Australia investigation.

That same day the department issued the new regulations prohibiting exports of livestock to twelve named Indonesian slaughterhouses, two of which had never received Australian cattle. It was becoming obvious that decisions were being made on the run and that no one in the department or the minister's office had properly read my report, which only mentioned the two community slaughterhouses for comparison with those that did take our animals. Again we wrote back itemising the flaws in the decision and reiterating the inadequacy of all known slaughterhouses in Indonesia to slaughter cattle humanely.

By this time other key groups had also made up their minds that suspending individual abattoirs was a wholly inadequate response to the situation. The Australian Veterinary Association came out strongly in

support of a suspension of the trade to Indonesia *until the same animal welfare standards as Australia's can be assured. This means that pre-slaughter stunning must be mandatory and the appropriate use of restraining boxes is enforced.* The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC), the peak body representing meat processors and retailers, described the ban as *a token gesture*, and wrote directly to the minister seeking his *urgent and effective intervention to suspend the live export of cattle to Indonesia until a comprehensive process has been developed to ensure that whole of life animal welfare standards are applied to animals from Australia which are destined for processing.*

After some negotiation over the date and purpose of the meeting, on the 6th of June we were finally able to meet the minister. Gathered around a table in his office were Ludwig, Conall O'Connell, Secretary of the department, and the minister's adviser Alastair Lawrie. Heather, Lyn and I were accompanied by independent MP Andrew Wilkie who had taken up a forceful role in backing our campaign in parliament and who had a reasonably good relationship with the government at that time. He had offered his support in reaching out to Ludwig. Also accompanying us was Tom Maguire from AMIC. Maguire had a solid history of supporting the development and implementation of high animal welfare standards within Australian abattoirs and was no fan of live exports. By this time the board of AMIC had becoming increasingly concerned that the public reaction to *Four Corners* would cause significant damage to the meat processing industry in Australia. We all had a common purpose: to try to persuade Ludwig that the only way to protect Australian livestock from further cruelty was to suspend the Indonesian trade entirely.

We started by asking if the minister was aware of media reports that morning in *The Age* indicating that the MLA had a new proposition to funnel animals through some twenty abattoirs. He said he didn't know any detail. We expressed our disappointment with the government's action and stressed that so far not one animal had been protected from the cruelty witnessed on *Four Corners*. We talked in more detail about how the industry couldn't control its supply chains, and that the

widespread use of Mark 1 boxes necessitated cruelty. Maguire talked in terms of the damage being done to the meat industry reputation in Australia and overseas. He argued that the support of the community was being lost, with anecdotal evidence that meat sales in Australia had dropped by ten per cent in the previous week. Wilkie talked about his concern that the government was losing its moral compass. We closed by reminding the minister of the 70,000 to 100,000 Australian cattle already in Indonesia at that moment and stating that, until the trade was stopped, the government had an ongoing responsibility to those animals and should be sending in its own staff to monitor their wellbeing.

We left the meeting with little hope that Ludwig would act and therefore decided that our only course now was for Wilkie to request a meeting with the Prime Minister. In our joint media release later that day I was quoted as saying:

We are bitterly disappointed that one week after this brutality was exposed, the government has failed to act with the urgency that the Australian people expect to address the cruel treatment of Australian cattle exported to Indonesia. There are still over 110 locations where Australian cattle are known to be slaughtered and where the same fate exposed by Four Corners will await them.

It seemed to have taken forever at the time, but at about 10pm on the 7th of June, a little more a week after *A Bloody Business*, I got a call from Richard Willingham at *The Age*. He said something was going to be announced and that we would be pleased with what it was, but he couldn't tell me anything more. At midnight the story broke online—a few hours later it was on that paper's front page. Minister Ludwig had suspended all exports of cattle to Indonesia. The headline in *The Age* read: *Ban on live cattle trade to Indonesia—Canberra bows to people power.*

19. THE ROLE OF DIRECT PROTEST

It is sometimes argued that the effect of direct public protest on political decision-making is a distortion of our democratic processes. People power certainly has impact in our society but so, as has already been discussed, do other pressure groups. The mining industry's success in undermining the Rudd government's tax on mining super-profits is an example of this, and one that helped pave the way for subsequent populist opposition to the carbon tax. Whether any of these interventions are healthy additions to each individual's say at the ballot box may be a vexed question but they are all allowable under law. It is also reasonable to argue that, because governments are elected on a catch-all basis, we all have the right to challenge them on those issues we did not want to vote for—we may strongly disagree with some of a party's policies but decide that, overall, we will vote for it. It seems inevitable that governments will always claim a mandate for everything they have argued for in an election campaign, so it is perhaps an essential extension of democracy that citizens have the right to highlight, fight for, and question particular issues that concern them. Similarly, participants in an industry, such as cattle producers, have a right to appoint representatives to lobby government in their interests.

That some groups have far more financial resources than others is, though, of more concern; the wealthy being able to commission extensive advertising campaigns and their clout enabling them to exert greater pressure behind the scenes—an influence that remains relatively opaque to public scrutiny. Money speaks and is heard. The distortion of the democratic process caused by the power of money should be of far greater concern than the mobilisation of public opinion for a cause. The influence a tycoon like Rupert Murdoch has through his ownership of media outlets, the clout Clive Palmer has wielded through employing his wealth to fund his own political party, or the power Gina Reinhart has through buying advertising space to support the industries that create her wealth, all arguably have far more skewing leverage on our political processes than that of any popular movement or pressure group. Rather

than an entitled individual expressing his or her will, these groups require a gathering together of many people through shared values, and demanding organisational efforts, before any influence can be brought to bear. A campaign like the animal welfare movement's attempt to ban live exports was a long and rigorous process which used dramatic evidence that aroused a massive public outcry sufficient to shake a government into action. Although the evidence was held back briefly and wielded strategically, it was straightforward and real. Despite attempts to assert otherwise, no spin or fabrication was used to distort the process. This was a grassroots campaign, relying on hard work rather than buying-power, and its approach to government was transparent. That the minister and his advisers chose to ignore our frequent approaches and advice was a political decision.

Some politicians, including Labor members, with hindsight see the suspension of the trade as having been a mistake. No government likes to be wedged or swayed from its course, and a class action begun in 2014 by cattle producers against Joe Ludwig as Minister for Agriculture seems to underscore their view that the decision to suspend was a folly. But what is missed in such an analysis is that government should rely on comprehensive advice and, in this case, overwhelming evidence was there for it to make the right decision following full discussion and consultation. After the Caple report, when we again approached the minister with detailed and expanded evidence of the severity of problems with the Indonesian trade, he made no such decision, merely referring our view to the industry.

The inescapable problem here is that, because it is all but impossible for industry to control what happens in another country, it attempts to obscure what is happening to avoid damage to its trade. Government should, in fact, be wise to the inherent problem. It may be difficult to discover what is actually happening in these markets, but that is no excuse for turning a blind eye on the pretext of saving the bottom line for national exports. Governments can't know the detail of commercial agreements, but they can and should know if the nation's reputation is being damaged and, more importantly, whether its ethical values are

being trashed.

Not only did the Abbott government seek to minimise the influence of public outcry over animal welfare, it cut all advice on this important aspect of agricultural practices, and consequently became even more vulnerable to the very problem that beset the Gillard Labor administration. To avoid the sort of trauma that Labor faced, it needed to take all the advice it could get. The exact nature of Ludwig's mistake was to rely on partial advice. In our view, one of the problems prior to 2011 was that extremely poor decisions were made in relation to Mark 1 boxes by the joint government and industry committee set up to fund infrastructure and training in live export markets. No animal welfare organisations were represented on that committee. Where consultation is broad, all viewpoints are known and the risk of poor decisions is mitigated. But clever politics includes engagement with stakeholders, not just consultation. If the minister had fully acknowledged the problems in Indonesia and acted to find a solution earlier, he would have avoided significant political pain. Instead he ambushed himself by leaving it all to industry. Signalling the advice they want or, worse still, consciously turning their back on unwelcome viewpoints tends to turn governments into one-eyed monsters, and vulnerable ones at that.

Although writing as early as the 9th of June 2011, immediately after the suspension was enacted, Michelle Grattan, then Political Editor at *The Age*, was already able to give a sound overview of the failed process, an analysis that government should have attempted to make itself very much earlier, and a situation about which industry should have been far from complacent. Here are some salient points from her article:

The suspension of the Indonesian cattle trade was the right and only thing to do in light of last week's footage and the public's totally justifiable outrage...

Grattan explained how Minister Ludwig had been warned of the problem for months, then quoted a letter that Heather Neil wrote to him in December 2010 about the failings of the Caple report:

It is clear that the majority of the animals observed (and likely the majority of animals exported) were subjected to significant levels of pain, fear and

distress.

It is the way in which the majority of cattle were slaughtered that has shocked us... we are very concerned that Australian-driven developments have served to entrench practices that involve significant risks to animal welfare.

Grattan went on to detail how, earlier that December, Ludwig had said *the Australian government does not condone animal abuse in the live export trade*, and that he was working with industry and animal welfare organisations to improve its practices. Then, in May, she added, *Ludwig made this extraordinary statement to a Senate hearing: 'It is not up to me to endorse a plan... I wanted to see a plan from them covering wherever we send animals. It is about the industry demonstrating... their chronology of improvement.'*

Grattan noted that, the day before her article appeared, *Ludwig said he had written to the live export industry in January to say animal welfare was not 'up to appropriate standards', and telling it to work with his department. The industry came back with an inadequate plan in March, he said.*

Ludwig now says he is shocked by the Four Corners footage. The evidence suggests, however, that if he had probed properly, he could have found out what was really going on.

Another journalist, from the rural press, writing in an email to our office put it even more bluntly:

The government baffle me—they... have trouble taking action on an issue like livestock export that requires clear cut action and [has] overwhelming popular support for a halt to the trade.

Yes, some cattlemen up north will lose their jobs for a while but not doing something about this issue is like not abolishing capital punishment because the hangman will be out of a job!

What do they do—hold another inquiry!—don't they own a TV set? Suppose they hope it will all go away.

Of as much concern as any other potential failing or distortion of the democratic process is the question of the health of the relationship between government and its bureaucratic advisers. When an issue flares politically, the breadth, cogency and impartiality of advice given

to government is of vital importance. In recent years a great deal has been written and said about the undermining of such independent advice from the public service. The general perception that advice is being consistently distorted by officials second-guessing political expectations is borne out by our experience with the Department of Agriculture documented throughout this book. The department has a particular in-built difficulty in considering ethical issues because of its central role of promoting successful agricultural trade. In an economy experiencing contraction in some sectors, there is increasing pressure to maximize rural exports. Unlike some comparable countries, Australia has no independent instrumentality that oversees and reconciles competing interests within a department's responsibilities. While attempting to remain impartial, our bureaucrats are in fact hostage to a political process that places an absolute premium on economic income without demanding that this income is derived through ethical practices.

The establishment of such an overseeing body is essential to making decisions that, in the long run, protect animal welfare and the interests of producers. Unfortunately, the present federal government appears to have the view that such oversight creates red tape that gets in the way of economic progress. This is a fundamental misreading of reality. In a well-planned, long-term strategy, ethical issues are built into systems so industry is protected from sudden shocks. As we have argued consistently throughout this book, high animal welfare standards then become a marketing advantage for Australia's farmers.

20. BRIEFING THE POLITICIANS

In the weeks before the broadcast of *A Bloody Business*, Lyn and I had concentrated on briefing a number of sympathetic politicians to gain support for our position. As we have already seen, Andrew Wilkie was one of these. At that time in the Gillard government's term, before Peter Slipper had been placed in the Speaker's chair, Wilkie had the ear of the Prime Minister on a weekly basis and, from what we'd learnt of his background, we felt he was likely to engage with the issue. In May, we had travelled to Hobart to meet Wilkie in his electorate office and to show him what Lyn had seen in Indonesia. A special edit of the footage had been prepared for these initial meetings that would make the most impact in the limited time we thought he would give us. We need not have been concerned—Wilkie's response was unequivocally supportive and he immediately asked what he could do to help. Indeed to this day his commitment to ending live exports has been unwavering. Lyn and I were both still intensely at work preparing campaign materials so it was a whirlwind trip, leaving the next day for Adelaide and a meeting with Independent Senator Nick Xenophon.

Showing the footage to others was a significant step forward, but it heightened our anxiety that somehow our plans would be leaked. On the way up to Xenophon's office, Lyn and I joked about a workman who had been fixing the wiring outside the lift. Could he be an MLA agent planting a listening device? Although Xenophon looked tired when he came into the room, he focused as we ran through our pitch. He was just as horrified as Wilkie had been about the situation we described and straight away was full of questions and ideas for what he could do politically.

Back in Canberra, we met with Senator Rachel Siewert, the Greens' spokesperson for animal welfare, as well as staff from other Greens' offices. The Greens are the only party with a policy clearly opposing live exports, so we were assured of their support, but each time we showed any of the footage we were nervous. Hard though it was to watch, we knew how important it was that people understood just how bad the

situation in Indonesia was. The Greens were indeed shocked but decisively galvanised to help.

It was through a connection made earlier with her Chief of Staff, Ainsley Gotto, that Lyn had also been able to brief Senator Coonan. A vegetarian since a childhood visit to an abattoir, Coonan was so appalled by what Lyn had described she could not bring herself to look at the footage but offered her assistance in gaining support within the Liberals.

Several Labor politicians who opposed the trade had made their views public; others had expressed concern behind the scenes. In March, Janelle Saffin, the member for Page (a rural electorate in northern New South Wales with a strong beef and dairy cattle industry) put forward a Private Member's motion that called for *renewed consideration* of a transition away from live exports towards an expanded meat export industry. Her colleagues Melissa Parke, Kirsten Livermore, Dick Adams and Jill Hall spoke in support of the motion, arguing that it made sense in terms of Australian jobs to expand the processing sector here. Greens MP Adam Bandt voiced his party's support for an immediate end to the trade. Three Coalition members spoke against the motion (Dan Tehan, John Cobb and Barry Haas). Their responses were predictable: as the member for Durak which covers more than half of Western Australia, Haas represented many of the producers who supplied the trade, and Tehan's electorate included Portland, the only live export port in Victoria.

Of the Labor members who nailed their colours to the mast on this issue, Melissa Parke and Kelvin Thomson were the most vocal. For Parke, the Member for Fremantle, the issue reflects the contradictions of her electorate. The port is the main hub for sheep exports in Australia, with 85 per cent of sheep leaving from there, trucked through the town from the assembly depots to the south. But the city has a progressive feel and the majority of residents oppose the trade. Although access to the port itself is restricted, there is never any doubt about when a vessel is loading—when the wind turns onshore, the fragrance of manure pervades the town. On the night *A Bloody Business* aired, Parke made

sure, through a speech to the House, that the cruelty broadcast by the ABC would be forever on the record in Hansard, ending with a call for a phased transition from live exports to onshore processing. In an adjournment speech the same day, Thomson urged his fellow parliamentarians to watch the program, argued the ethical and economic case for a transition, and called for action to suspend the trade to Indonesia.

The day after the program was broadcast, Wilkie and Xenophon held a joint press conference in support of an immediate ban on live exports to Indonesia. They argued that the trade was a blight on Australia's international reputation and announced plans to table identical bills to phase out live exports within three years, with transitional arrangements to include stunning for all exported animals. At the same time Bandt announced that the Greens would also be introducing bills into both houses calling for an immediate end to the trade.

We knew that without the support of Labor, neither of these attempts to change legislation had a chance of success, but at that stage in the campaign almost anything seemed possible. The number of our supporters on the backbench was expanding; at the Labor Caucus meeting following *A Bloody Business*, twenty members spoke out against the trade, one threatening to cross the floor if necessary if it came to a vote. Two days after the program, Parke tabled a 40,000-signature petition in the House of Representatives (the latest instalment in a long-running petition that by then had gained 300,000 names), calling for an end to live exports to the Middle East, and took the opportunity once again to call for *an immediate cessation of cattle exports to Indonesia until all the 120 or so slaughterhouses processing Australian cattle have been independently shown to comply with appropriate standards*.

A week after the suspension was announced, Caucus passed a motion for it to remain in place until Indonesian slaughterhouses receiving Australian cattle could comply with OIE 'standards'. Disappointingly though, and despite attempts by those opposing the trade to forge a compromise, the wording of the motion had been weakened to *encouraging the use of stunning* rather than making it a requirement for resumption of the trade, and it failed to lay the foundations for an investigation

into the potential for a transition away from live exports to a meat-only trade.

The Coalition as a whole became less sympathetic—while the day after *A Bloody Business* there had been heated discussion in the party room, and we heard privately from a number of politicians that they did not support the trade, no one was willing to speak publicly in support of a transition. Media comments from the National's leader, Warren Truss, and John Cobb, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, increasingly became a reflection of the industry line: while they initially supported a ban on 'rogue' abattoirs, they failed to acknowledge how widespread the cruelty was and did not support the full suspension of the trade to Indonesia. It was Truss who fronted the media on the issue, and who backed the industry plan to limit exports to twenty-five abattoirs, claiming that the blanket suspension would *just see Indonesia import live animals from elsewhere* (something that, it must be remembered, was never likely given Indonesia's foot-and-mouth disease-free status). In an interview with Fran Kelly on ABC Radio National Breakfast, Truss spoke of the impact the ban was having on the industry, accusing the government of *dawdling* and claiming that with electronic tagging of cattle the trade could be back up and running within days. In parliamentary question time the following week, Tony Abbott described the impact of the suspension in terms of the *unfolding disaster* it entailed for Northern Territory cattle producers, without mentioning the cruelty that had led to it. Their focus was squarely on the concerns of affected producers. Coonan's reaction to the cruelty depicted in the footage had had no effect when it came to persuading her colleagues to shift their ground.

When the minister suspended the trade to Indonesia, he also announced a government review of the entire live export trade. A week later the Senate backed a Greens motion for the Rural Affairs and Transport Reference Committee to conduct a separate inquiry into the trade particularly focused on the role of the MLA and Livecorp. Each of these processes would provide an opportunity to expose the acceptance by industry of the situation in Indonesia.

While Parliament was wrestling with the issue in these ways, our campaign moved onward with new strategies to harness public support. By the middle of June the number of visitors to the Ban Live Export website had hit half a million, with over 100,000 letters to the Prime Minister generated from the site and many more sent to individual MPs and senators. Despite two weeks having passed since the *Four Corners* broadcast, federal politicians were still receiving around 500 emails or phone calls a week protesting about the cruelty. To add further momentum we launched a virtual protest on the website, where supporters could upload a video and tell the Prime Minister in their own words what they thought of the live export trade and why it should end. The response was incredible and heartfelt, with hundreds of people speaking directly to camera articulating their opposition to the trade and their frustration with the government's continued support for it. By September the virtual protest site had been viewed over 90,000 times, but the most significant figure reached by that time was the million times our campaign videos had been watched. We had never imagined we would be able to reach so many people. But we'd never before brought together the depth of experience, energy and focus that had come from the collaboration of the RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia teams. In particular, the capacity of Karen Nilsen to rapidly design elegant responses to emerging issues was key to the success of the online campaign. One memorable creation from this time was a bleak parody of a Livecorp promotional video extolling the virtues of the Mark 1 box. Karen spliced into the Livecorp vision, which featured an MLA representative standing in front of a sparkling new concrete and steel construction, excerpts of footage of cattle tripping, falling and slamming their heads against the slab, while the original narration continued: *The restraining box takes away all the risk involved when trying to restrain the Australian cattle, making it more efficient, effective, profitable and, most of all, reducing the stress levels to the cattle.*

When you are deeply immersed in an issue that is subject to so much media attention, you develop a keen sense of how journalists are reacting to events, how well they know their subject, and how persistent they

are in their questioning. On a rare evening when I made it home, Julian and I watched Chris Uhlmann interviewing the WA Premier Colin Barnett on ABC's 7.30 about the suspension. Outraged with the inaccurate statements Barnett made that had gone unchallenged, I emailed Uhlmann the next morning. He emailed back saying that the RSPCA's side of the debate had been well represented, and that Mr Barnett was entitled to his views. Unimpressed, I looked into Uhlmann's previous coverage of the issue. Every interview I saw had a focus on the impact of the suspension on indigenous jobs, including those with Wilkie and the Prime Minister. Then I found that a few days earlier he had written on the ABC website *The Drum*:

There is no excuse for the shocking animal cruelty in Indonesian abattoirs and the Government should play a role in ensuring that the live export trade is cleaned up. But just pulling the plug on it risks a catastrophic destruction of jobs and fragile regional economies. Contractors—road train drivers, helicopter pilots—were having their work terminated within hours of the suspension of the trade. Indigenous jobs—any jobs—in regional and remote communities are hard to come by. Their loss would also be a tragedy.

Every journalist has the right to write opinion pieces, but their views should not carry over into their work as an interviewer. It seemed to me that had happened here. I wrote to the Director of ABC News, Kate Torney, setting out the inaccurate statements Barnett had made, including: that animals exported to Indonesia went into abattoirs which met *international standards*; that the trade could resume immediately and the welfare of cattle be assured; that what *Four Corners* portrayed was slaughter at *backyard abattoirs*; and that Indonesia would source animals from southern Africa or South America if we stopped supply. Not long after sending my email my mobile rang—it was Kate Torney. She apologised; she was sorry if I felt that Uhlmann had not appeared impartial. We talked the issue through for some time, all the while my mind whirring at the concept that an email from someone at the RSPCA was now enough to warrant a phone call from the Director of ABC News. Just how big a story animal welfare had become was only beginning to sink in.

Monday the 20th of June saw several developments at Parliament House. Heather Neil dropped into Wilkie's office and was surprised to see the erratic Independent MP Bob Katter, hat and all, talking closely with Wilkie. They had made an unlikely alliance to move a motion to import sixty *stun-guns* to Indonesia, along with Australian know-how to help the locals sort out their abattoirs. John Cobb tabled a motion in support of the live export industry which noted the impact of the suspension, called for assistance for affected producers, and proposed establishing a *register of Indonesian abattoirs... that have adopted and implemented acceptable animal welfare standards*. At the heart of the opposition's position was the view that the government had caved-in to a vocal minority in ordering the suspension. In Cobb's words it was *a massive overreaction from a government that has lost all credibility with the general public in dealing with difficult issues, who acts first and thinks later*. Those affected financially by the suspension, not least the exporters themselves, found their voice and, through Coalition members, a way to increase the political pressure to reopen the trade.

Also on the 20th of June, Wilkie and Xenophon's bills were tabled in both houses. Bandt also tabled his bill, its equivalent having been introduced by Rachel Siewert in the Senate the previous week. On the same day, Minister Ludwig announced his plans for the terms under which the trade with Indonesia could resume. These would require Indonesian abattoirs receiving Australian cattle to meet the OIE recommendations and for exporters to put in place a supply chain assurance program for all their cattle; essentially a closed traceable system with minimum standards. Making this a prerequisite for the continuation of the trade was a massive breakthrough. The next day Ludwig met with Indonesia's trade and agriculture ministers in Jakarta to hold discussions on how the standards could be implemented as a condition of restarting the trade.

The introduction of a closed system was exactly the strategy that both RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia had suggested to government as early as 2008 as a solution to ending poor handling and slaughter practices in the Middle East. The response in 2009 from then

Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke, was that limiting the trade in this way would be *problematic* and that the government preferred to *work towards all countries adopting the OIE animal welfare standards into their own domestic laws*—an approach that would take decades to realise if it had any impact at all. The fact that the government was now willing to adopt a closed system was another sign of how it takes a crisis to spur government into decisive action. At the end of June the Department of Agriculture flagged that it was the government’s intention to expand the supply chain program to all importing countries, including for sheep to the Middle East. For the first time in the history of the trade, the government would be recognising through regulation that exporters had a responsibility for the welfare of Australian livestock in importing countries.

While the debate around the suspension of exports to Indonesia ground on in Canberra, the terms of reference for the promised review of the trade were released. The minister had appointed Bill Farmer AO, to lead the process. Farmer, a retired diplomat and former Ambassador to Indonesia, had no history with the industry but its pervasive influence had already ensured that the possibility of a transition away from live exports would not be considered. The terms of reference were framed around an ongoing live trade, together with the adequacy and effectiveness of the current regulatory system, consistency with the OIE recommendations, and risk management strategies needed to establish what would become known as the exporter supply chain assurance scheme—ESCAS. Farmer had until the end of August to report back.

On the 6th of July, after only five weeks, the government announced the lifting of the export suspension, and provided an outline of what ESCAS for Indonesia would entail. The system was based on four elements: exporters providing evidence that their supply chains are controlled; all animals in a consignment being individually identifiable and traceable along the supply chain; assurance that facilities meet OIE ‘standards’; and the use of third-party auditors to assess compliance with these requirements. The objective of the new approach was *to deliver high levels of confidence to both the Australian Government and the*

broader community that acceptable animal welfare standards are being applied to Australian animals.

Nine of the Labor MPs who had been outspoken in their opposition to the trade signed a statement expressing concern about the resumption of exports. As members of the Caucus working group examining the issue, they were also annoyed that they had not been told of the minister's intention to lift the suspension. While it was clear the government was at pains to show support for the industry, we had hoped that this group of Labor MPs would at least be able to impose a requirement for mandatory stunning, given that we knew there was no religious opposition to this in Indonesia. Before the suspension there were four abattoirs using stunning and, as Sarah Ferguson had documented, knowledge of the impending *Four Corners* program had already acted as a catalyst to increase its introduction. By mid-June, according to the MLA, there were eleven facilities with stunning equipment in use and plans in place for a further three facilities. Some producers, such as the Heytesbury Cattle Company which ran 150,000 cattle across six stations, had gone as far as to demand stunning as a requirement of sale with a *no stun, no deal* policy. It would have been entirely feasible to have made stunning mandatory for the Indonesian market. In her discussions with various cattle industry groups and individual producers, Heather found that most of them recognised that the long-term sustainability of the industry would be impacted if all Australian animals were not stunned.

We knew many Labor MPs were worried about the potential public backlash if the government allowed cattle to return to Indonesia to be slaughtered while fully conscious, and that some Coalition members were also concerned that a recommencement of trade under these conditions would not meet community expectations. With this in mind, Wilkie and Xenophon held another press conference calling for a conscience vote on their Bill, which was due to be decided in mid-August. It was unlikely that the Prime Minister would allow Labor members to exercise a conscience vote, and because of the requirement for party solidarity, it was also unlikely the true extent of community outrage would be reflected in any division. They would, instead, be forced to vote down

a bill that would mandate stunning prior to a phase-out of live exports.

We now know, though, that what was holding the government back in making stunning a requirement was the precedent this would set for other markets (especially the Middle East) where unstunned slaughter was the norm. As usual, ethical practices were being considered only when commercial expediency allowed.

Our other major concern was that the conditions under which ESCAS would operate were being developed by an industry-government working group with no input from animal welfare organisations. While it seemed officials in the department were falling over themselves to keep us regularly updated about developments, this was not the same as allowing us to contribute to the process. We doubted the pressure to exclude us had come from producers themselves and, while exporters had never wanted us there, it seemed more likely to have been Ludwig's call. There were rumours that the minister strongly resented our exposing the problems in Indonesia in such a public way and thus embarrassingly forcing his hand.

Each of these developments required new calls to action for our supporters—and so we asked them to contact their federal MP or senator to request their personal view on ending live exports. We also alerted them to the Farmer review and Senate enquiry and encouraged them to provide their input. We needed to prepare our own organisations' submissions to these enquiries, something that under other circumstances would have had several weeks' notice. Now the work had a short turnaround, having to fit around our intensified campaigning, and without my input. Just before the lifting of the export suspension had been announced, my ability to contribute to these tasks had come to an abrupt halt. Months before the situation in Indonesia had begun to be understood, I had booked a family trip to visit relatives overseas. By the time it came around I was so preoccupied with work that, had the decision only affected me, I would have cancelled the trip. But I had others to consider. Boarding a plane at the end of June, I hoped to free my mind from its constant, numbing replaying of those ghastly slaughter scenes, and finally give my daughters the attention they had been lacking for

nearly four months. Towards the end of that intense time, I'd begun to have trouble speaking when doing interviews. It was as though my voice had choked itself in response to all the pressure.

I was staying at my brother's flat in London, about to return home, when Elders received the first permit issued since the suspension to export 3000 cattle to Indonesia on the 25th of July. It wasn't surprising that their Australian designed and run abattoir was the first to meet ESCAS requirements. The gradual resumption of trade with Indonesia was now inevitable, but at the time we had no idea how rapidly the industry would reconstruct its networks and once again expose Australian livestock to the risks of inhumane slaughter.

21. THE AFTERMATH

Campaigning to change public policy almost inevitably requires great persistence. Even a cursory glance at historical precedents confirms this. On the way there are always advances and setbacks, highs and lows. There are moments when it all appears to be coming together, and others when the obstacles seem so immovable you wonder whether it is worth continuing. And there are people who inspire you with their energy and conviction, and others who will stoop lower than you would ever expect in their attack on a position they disagree with. In the aftermath of the surge of support for the campaign to stop the live export trade there were bad days. One of the worst came on the 10th of August, 2011.

The Senate inquiry into the live export trade included a series of hearings, three in Canberra and three across northern Australia. Six of us attended the first Canberra hearing. We were there to give evidence. Perhaps unconsciously we were seeking safety in numbers, although we were not expecting a particularly difficult time. The terms of reference of the inquiry were focused on the effectiveness of government and industry in improving animal welfare standards in live export markets, and the domestic economic impact of the trade within Australia. This was nothing we weren't prepared to deal with, and had plenty to say on the failings of industry when it came to animal welfare. Besides, several of us had given evidence at such hearings before and had not experienced anything like the grillings famously meted out to public servants during Senate Estimates. That turned out to be the point—we were not quite ready for the ambush that had been prepared for us. It was only as we took our places at the table across from the senators that I began to feel at all nervous.

As we had throughout the campaign, RSPCA Australia and Animals Australia presented a united front, although we gave separate opening statements. After Lyn White had finished hers, Senator Bill Heffernan, the Committee Chair, asked her if her organisation, and she personally, wanted to end the killing of animals. Clearly then, the questions were not going to stick to the terms of reference. Heffernan was also in

the mood for random interjection—soon after, during Senator Siewert’s turn at questions, he scolded Heather Neil for not coming to the opposition with our concerns about Indonesia as soon as we first had them, claiming that they would have *done our damndest to sort this out in the wet season*.

Then it was Senator Chris Back’s turn. As already detailed, the last time we had talked to Back was three days after *Four Corners*, when he had left us with the impression he understood how bad things were in Indonesia and why we had gone to the media. That seemed an age ago now, and his demeanour towards us was very different. Back prided himself on being the only veterinarian in the federal parliament at the time, and it became clear how much he saw himself as the real expert at the hearing in evaluating the *Four Corners* footage. His first questions focused on a tiny segment of footage taken from another program—*60 Minutes* in 2006—which Sarah Ferguson had described as showing Australian cattle in Egypt’s notorious Basateen abattoir. This was an error that had been carried through from the original *60 Minutes* commentary—the cattle shown were, in fact, not Australian, but Australian cattle were known to have been subjected to the same brutal treatment and the government of the time suspended trade to Egypt as a result. But it was becoming clear that Back’s purpose in his questioning was to undermine the veracity of the program. There had been malicious rumours flying around social media for some time claiming that not all the animals in the Indonesian footage were Australian, and pointing out the error in the Egyptian footage would serve to cast further doubt over the status of the rest of the animals shown. He reiterated his argument:

My point is that Ms Ferguson was wrong. The opportunity, no doubt, will be presented to ask her why she was.

He then rapidly changed tack, focusing only on Lyn. What were the dates she visited Indonesia? Who funded the trip? Where did she meet up with the cameraman? Who was he and was he Australian? I saw Lyn pause, and then give her co-investigator’s name and the company he ran. Until that moment, the name of the person behind the second camera had been unknown to all but a few of us: now it was on the public

record. It was a decision Lyn would deeply regret because of the importance of his anonymity as an undercover investigator. In retrospect we all agonised over why one of us had not objected to the question—but at the time we were caught in the oppressive theatre of the moment.

Back went on to ask specific details about Lyn's visit to Sumatra—to Medan—and whether she used a taxi or a driver, and whether it was the same driver all the time. Who he was on that visit? Whether he was acting under her direction? I wondered where this line of questioning was leading and interjected, asking what relevance all this had to the inquiry. Back dismissed me: *Thank you Dr Jones, that will become apparent.*

More questions about the driver: Was he the one who gained access to the abattoirs? Did he act as the interpreter? What did he do while she was filming? Did she ask permission to film? Did she make it clear why they were filming? Again, I tried to get Back to explain himself: *It would probably help in answering these questions if we actually understood why you are asking them and what the relevance is.* Back responded: *I will come to that, Dr Jones. That is fine.* I retorted: *I am sorry. You keep saying you will. It is quite important to actually know in the context of these questions why you are asking them.* He batted me aside and moved on. There would be no stopping him—he had not yet dropped his bomb:

Ms White, can I take you, please, to the footage that was shown of the Mabar abattoir in Sumatra. This is the one where a person is seen to be kicking an animal.

He was taking Lyn back to the worst scene she had witnessed in Medan: the prolonged torture of the steer that had slipped and broken his leg and that she had agonised over not being able to prevent. Back's rapid questioning ceased and, as promised, he began to explain his intent:

The information available to me from a very reliable source who visited that abattoir some days later is this: 'The white lady and the bule'—bule, Chair, is an Indonesian slang term for white male foreigner—and the driver came to the abattoir. The cameraman and the driver came to him and offered him 150,000 rupiah to kick the animal in the head repeatedly until they got the film they wanted. He did not want to do this for religious reasons, but

his family needed money, so he did. He kicked it a number of times and then stopped. They asked him to keep going and he did. Do you have no awareness of this?

Lyn responded: *I find even the suggestion that that occurred to be very offensive.*

Back continued:

I find it to be absolutely tragic. According to the person who spoke to this man, the workers at the time thought that he was very wise, very smart, to get 150,000 rupiah. Since work has declined at the abattoir, they have now turned on him. He has been beaten on a daily basis and, unfortunately, in retribution his wife and daughter have been raped and he has now been ostracised from that community. It will be necessary, I think... for us to call at some time your associate. I have no suggestion at all that you had any knowledge of that, but that is a verbatim account of what happened.

There was more, but this was the worst of it, and the media were waiting. A few minutes later, Back walked out of a side door of the committee room and up to their awaiting microphones to repeat his allegations—but this time, outside the boundaries of parliamentary privilege, he was exquisitely careful not to defame Lyn personally and open himself up to legal challenge.

Having watched every minute, including the continuous footage from the covert camera that Lyn's colleague wore through every visit from the moment they arrived, I knew how the incident in question had unfolded. Any attempt to talk to one of the workers would have been recorded. The steer in question was filmed in the pen where it fell and broke its leg. It was then kicked in an attempt to make it move. The prolonged torture of that animal was a seamless, horrific process. Not only was it something that would have been impossible to set up, I knew without a shadow of doubt that it was something Lyn could never have countenanced. She is a person passionately driven to uncover cruelty. She could never encourage it—she was not capable of that in any circumstance.

During the hearing, Back had said that he had an affidavit in front of him which supported his claims, yet the document he later produced

neither related to the abattoir in question nor to the allegations of payment for deliberate cruelty. Nor did he subsequently provide any other substantiation of these allegations. Later, after an exchange of legal letters between Back and Lyn White about the accusation, Back's lawyers stated: *Our client accepts that your client [Lyn] was not involved in the payment for animals to be harmed deliberately in pursuit of footage for the Four Corners Program.* But Back did not retract the accusation that *someone* had offered money in exchange for cruelty—no matter how implausible that was—and in any case by this time the damage had been done. The story was reported widely in the rural press, and a shadow was cast.

While I had been on leave in Europe, Lyn was also overseas under less enjoyable circumstances, leading an abattoir investigation in Turkey. Turkey was being touted as a major emerging market for Australian animals with 300,000 animals exported there already. The day before the Senate committee hearing, Animals Australia advised the minister's office of footage they had obtained of cattle and sheep routinely hoisted off the ground, dangling by one leg before having their throats cut, taken at facilities known to receive Australian animals. The following week, after the minister had made the issue public, Animals Australia held a press conference in Parliament House and played the footage to a room packed with politicians and press gallery journalists. The level of media interest had not receded. What stuck in our throats was how willing exporters were to secure contracts in new countries regardless of the treatment that their animals would face. When I later read a European Union-funded report (released in 2012) investigating Turkish slaughter practices it was clear how far these fell short of those required in EU countries, to the point that Turkish slaughtermen lacked any training to help them understand animal welfare or the basics of animal pain or suffering. Any exporter walking into a Turkish abattoir and observing the treatment of sheep or cattle as documented by Animals Australia would have been well aware of these deficiencies.

Fortunately, in the same week as the Senate hearing we also saw one of the most uplifting days in the campaign, when 20,000 Australians attended anti-live export rallies across the country. I spoke at the Canberra

rally, watched news coverage of those in Sydney and Melbourne, and was overwhelmed by the support shown by so many people from such varied backgrounds—including many farmers bitterly disappointed at the way their industry had failed them. This was my first major public event since returning from overseas, and the first time I had spoken face-to-face with so many supporters. Despite the break, the fear of losing my voice during interviews was still with me. But this was different—out there in the crowd everyone avidly supported the same thing and it felt good to be able to share the moment with them. Before the rallies, our second campaign advertisement had been released—it was funded by the money raised through GetUp—and was screening in cinemas around the country. The next week both Ban Live Export ads were featured in the *How do you sell...* segment in ABC's *The Gruen Transfer*. Politicians' inboxes were once again full of emails about the trade. Animal welfare had never been so integrated a part of the public consciousness.

While there was still no movement of cattle out of the north of Australia, live exports from the south had continued unabated throughout the course of the campaign. Midway through August, the *Al Messilah*, a livestock carrier with 67,000 sheep on board, experienced a mechanical failure after leaving Adelaide bound for the Middle East. After sitting in the Spencer Gulf for seven days, the vessel was forced to return to port. With the media still hungry for live export stories, there was considerable attention paid to the ship and the way in which the incident was handled by government authorities. Department of Agriculture officers in Adelaide and Canberra kept us and RSPCA South Australia informed about the arrangements, at least up to a point. The RSPCA SA inspectorate asked to be allowed to board the ship to check on the sheep's welfare, but their request was initially refused.

As the vessel was inspected for its seaworthiness, for the first time there was consideration of unloading the sheep—something that was usually off the table due to the risk of introducing disease. If this occurred, the sheep would either be reloaded onto another ship for export or would have to be slaughtered in Australia. The incident yet again

highlighted the risks of long sea voyages with such large cargoes, indeed it was fortunate that the mechanical failure had not occurred with the vessel in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Eventually RSPCA SA inspectors were granted access to the vessel, just before the sheep were unloaded and quarantined. They were held in feedlots north of Adelaide until a replacement vessel, the *Al Shurwaikh*, was able to take them on to Qatar in early September. Two hundred and ninety-eight sheep died from inanition (failure to eat) or endemic disease over that time—a fairly typical death rate given the length of the aborted voyage. More than six weeks passed between these sheep first leaving the feedlot and their eventual arrival in Doha.

The next day Heather, Lyn and I sat in the public gallery of the House of Representatives, watching on as the Wilkie and Bandt bills were voted down. Seeing the division being called, and every Labor member present walk away from the opportunity to end the trade and cross the floor to sit with the Coalition members, was a sobering moment. Melissa Parke chose to absent herself from the chamber to avoid the vote, and was subsequently reprimanded for not voting with her party. While the need to maintain party solidarity in the political process is understandable, when it forces people to vote against their conscience it is difficult to accept. And it is easy to feel despondent in the face of such setbacks. Knowing that live exports continue is a hard reality to face when support for its end was so strong. But we have a responsibility not only to push for an end to exports, but also to protect those animals that are subject to the trade for as long as it continues. And our strategy has been to rethink and redirect our activities each time a set-back has occurred.

In the expectation of losing the vote on the Wilkie and Bandt legislation, we had worked with backbenchers to gain support for a motion in the Labor caucus for mandatory stunning as part of the export supply chain. The motion also called for the establishment of a new body made up of industry, government and animal welfare sector representatives to oversee the regulation of the industry. But, after pressure from the minister, the motion was watered down from requiring stunning as a

condition of export to just encouraging it.

In the years since 2011, those politicians who openly oppose the trade have done much to keep the issue alive in parliament. Over the past five years, Wilkie has introduced five separate bills aimed at requiring stunning or phasing out the trade and the Greens have introduced three aimed at ending it immediately. After becoming the spokesperson for animal welfare for the Greens, Senator Lee Rhiannon has been consistent in scrutinising live export regulations and industry failure. Labor MPs Kelvin Thomson and Melissa Parke have continued to do their utmost to voice their opposition to the trade despite the limitations of party policy and the view of some in the Labor leadership that ESCAS has solved all problems. Several more Labor members have added their voice to calls for ending the trade.

But despite MPs continuing to receive more letters from their constituents opposing the trade than on any other issue, since forming government in 2013 the Coalition has done everything in its power to further it.

Senator Back's attempts to undermine the veracity of *A Bloody Business* did not stop with his attack on Lyn during our appearance in front of the Senate Committee. At another hearing, on September 14, which several of us attended, he began his questioning of Sarah Ferguson with an acknowledgment of his *absolute horror, both professionally and personally at the cruelty that we saw displayed during the program*, before launching a series of missiles. The first was to return to the error in labelling cattle as Australian in the short clip taken from *60 Minutes* of Basateen Abattoir, and repeated on *Four Corners*. Ferguson acknowledged the error, but pointed out its irrelevance since Australian cattle were known to have been subjected to the same brutal treatment, and trade to Egypt was suspended as a result.

His second line of questioning focused on the duration of abattoir footage shown in the program and what proportion of this was filmed by the ABC as opposed to *Animals Australia*, especially that concerning the scenes of the tortured steer in Medan (where the ABC had not been allowed in to film). The unspoken tone throughout was that the

Animals Australia footage was questionable, although, notably, Back did not raise again his unsubstantiated allegations of bribery. Ferguson repeatedly knocked back any suggestion from Back or other senators that the cruelty depicted was not widespread, describing in graphic detail what she and Michael Doyle had seen or filmed and urging the senators to watch the program again.

The questioning turned a number of times to the interval between taking the Animals Australia footage and the release of *A Bloody Business*, something Ferguson explained in terms of the extensive research and interviewing required for any *Four Corners* program. There were attempts (by the Chair, Bill Heffernan) to suggest that criminal action could have been taken to prosecute the Medan slaughterman, as though the cruelty had taken place under Australian jurisdiction, again ably dismissed by Ferguson.

Then Back turned his attention to footage taken by Lyn in the Jalan Stasiun abattoir in Medan of a steer, dubbed 'Tommy' in our campaign videos, who trembles as he watches his companions being killed and butchered around him. This animal, above all others, evoked huge empathy from the public and thus, I suppose, Back and his allies saw it as vital to undermine this scene.

He started with Temple Grandin, a world-renowned scientist who has had a huge influence on abattoir design in the USA, Australia and beyond. Her no-nonsense approach and insightful understanding of the behaviour of cattle in particular is used by McDonalds to help design the abattoirs they use, as well as by the MLA and others in Australia. Grandin was interviewed for *A Bloody Business* and had been characteristically blunt in her assessment of the Mark 1 box: *...you've got a box designed to make a cattle fall down. That violates every humane standard there is all around the world.* During the scene about Tommy, the program cut to Grandin stating that *fear circuits in the brains of mammals have been completely mapped. Animals definitely experience fear.* But in his attack, Back focused on something else: her undergraduate degree. He asked the question of Ferguson: *Are you aware whether or not Ms Grandin is a veterinarian?*

Temple Grandin is a Professor of Animal Science and has a PhD in animal behaviour, but she, like me, is not a veterinarian. Back knew this full well—it was his point. He went on to admonish Ferguson for not seeking the views of a veterinarian, such as Ivan Caple, to provide a clinical diagnosis of Tommy's symptoms. Back's ambush was to propose that, rather than Tommy's trembling being due to fear, the steer was instead suffering from transit tetany:

It is a shame you did not consult Dr Caple or any other veterinarian, because had you done so, had Ms Grandin even inquired as to the history of that particular circumstance, you would have been informed that the condition we all saw was a very common condition of cattle called transit tetany.

This suggestion had come out of nowhere. I looked on from the back of the room as Ferguson listened while Back continued:

Transit tetany in beef cattle is a condition of beef animals that come out of intensive feeding in a feedlot, that are transported a distance and that are not rested prior to slaughter. They exhibit all of the signs that we saw in your footage. It is a disease in which, clinically, there is a sudden drop in blood calcium and magnesium levels. What we saw, and you might remember, because you and I have looked at it—I am sure you have seen the footage more times than me, but probably not many more times...

Ferguson interjected: *I suspect many, many more.*

Restlessness, wild-eyed, extreme nervousness, agitated, easily excited, skeletal muscle tremors, unsteady on their feet, shivering continuously and showing rapid, gasping breathing.

I could barely contain my rage as Back continued with his assertion. Reviewing the scene in my mind—I too had watched it repeatedly—I thought of the unfolding events and Tommy's behaviour throughout the time that Lyn's or her companion's cameras were trained on him. How much of this had Back actually seen? It then dawned on me that his assertions were almost certainly based only on the 30 seconds of edited footage that appeared in *Four Corners*. The other question in my mind was why Back had not raised the idea of transit tetany in the previous hearing. Instead, he had claimed that Lyn's driver was out in the yard stirring up the animals prior to filming, something that Lyn made

clear had never occurred and was backed up by footage taken prior to the Tommy slaughter scene. Ferguson brought this up again now and made it clear:

I think you said before—if I may say—that the driver was outside stirring them up. That is not true. That did not happen.

Having failed in his attempt to suggest that Tommy's trembling was caused by being deliberately stirred up in the yards, Back was asserting a new explanation for it. It seemed to me that he was determined to find something that would detract from the possibility that this poor animal, enduring what was undoubtedly an intensely traumatic experience, could actually be showing signs of fear.

The next day, I sought expert opinions on Tommy's behaviour from a cattle behaviour specialist and two senior veterinarians, providing each with the full footage from both cameras: eighteen minutes from one and ten from the other; more than 20 minutes of real time overall. They stated that Tommy's behaviour indicated that he was alert, aware of what was occurring around him, and appeared to be reacting to the situation he was forced to endure. All agreed that it was entirely reasonable to suggest the steer was fearful or afraid; indeed he was in considerable distress and his welfare was severely compromised. They also held the view that it was impossible to accurately diagnose an underlying physiological condition without further evidence (a blood sample for instance), but in their view, it was highly unlikely that Tommy's symptoms were attributable to transit tetany—the symptoms did not match up. Rather, his behaviour was that of a normal, healthy animal subjected to an atrocious and terrifying experience. These opinions, together with the names of their authors, were tabled at the inquiry.

Some weeks later, Back tabled a series of his own submissions from fellow veterinarians to support his theory. None of these vets had requested access to the full footage. Making a clinical diagnosis from video is hard enough, but from only thirty edited seconds it is virtually impossible. The six opinions varied: some acknowledged that the steer could be fearful but that transit tetany was also a possibility; some were cautious in drawing clear conclusions from video evidence alone; two

were unequivocal in stating that the steer was suffering from transit tetany; another said that to suggest cattle tremble in fear was *fanciful* as the veterinary literature did not report it. One of the most explicit of the submissions in support of the transit tetany diagnosis was from a long-standing live export industry veterinarian—Michael Back—the senator's own brother.

What was it about the treatment of this particular steer that had attracted so much attention? The slaughter set-up in the Jalan Stasiun abattoir was unlike any other. A long, raised raceway against the back wall of the building had been divided into four individual pens—each was being used as a makeshift copy of a Mark 1 box. Tommy was the third in line of four similar blackish-brown Droughtmaster steers, each penned one after the other. Ironically, the raceway itself led directly into a standard Mark 1 box, which was empty and unused. The pens were constructed with metal bars, so between them each steer had full vision of what was occurring around them.

For the first eleven minutes Tommy was left in his pen where he could see his companions roped, pulled over onto their sides, held down and slaughtered, one by one. The handling was rough: tails were twisted and pulled to bring the animals down and their heads slapped hard against the concrete as they fell or struggled to get up. The slaughtermen's throat cuts were ineffective: each steer took some time to lose effective blood pressure, snorting and vocalising loudly as they died. At an early stage, Tommy started to tremble, but he also showed a number of other recognisable signs of fear. He backed away from the front of the pen and stood with his head down, looking away from the other steers. He kicked out when a passing worker sprayed him with the hose. Once the roping started he flicked his tail repeatedly and violently resisted the ropes, struggling more as he was pulled over. He fell head first onto the concrete and slapped his head down several more times before one of the men kicked his head to move it into position for slaughter. While he was tied down, the steer ahead of him, just a metre or so away, was being butchered. Then it was his turn: the slaughterman took 19 cuts to sever his throat and it was over two minutes before the steer lost

consciousness.

It was the layout of the pens and the fact that the steer was forced to stand and watch three of his herd-mates tripped over, their throats cut and their bodies butchered on the floor before him that was so shocking, combined with a few seconds of powerful vision as the camera focused on his trembling head and panned out to revealed the broader scene. To cast doubt on whether this animal was fearful was to call into question whether cattle should be thought of as sentient, aware beings at all. Furthermore, if herbivores did not intrinsically respond to the sight of other animals being killed they would not survive long. Anyone who has spent any time at all working with cattle knows they are capable of fear. Casting doubt on this was what was at the heart of Back's assertion.

Ferguson left immediately after her evidence and headed straight back to the airport and to her current story. But we stayed on to listen to the next witness—Professor Caple.

Caple began with a long opening statement in which he described his involvement in the industry-led visit to Indonesia in 2010. Hearing his voice again took me back to that meeting room in the department where, only nine months earlier I had first heard him expound on this trip. Then he moved on to discuss the RSPCA Australia report—my analysis of the footage. He made clear he was *fairly sceptical as to the observations and conclusions made in it* as it had not been peer-reviewed. He had a point: peer review is a crucial aspect of the scientific process, but it was unrealistic to expect it in the type of urgently, if carefully, prepared report I had written and, more to the point, this criticism also applied to the report he had co-authored which had not been subject to peer review either. And, unlike him, I had months ago submitted all my data and analysis to the department for scrutiny. He explained that he did not trust any video unless he had taken it himself, and would only use it as a secondary record, preferring instead to take notes. He mentioned that he knew me, and was flattering in his assessment of my ability to analyse the footage objectively, even describing me as *a good scientist* and stating:

I believe the Chief Scientist of the RSPCA has faithfully recorded what

was on the video.

But then came the catch—he did not believe that what I had been provided was authentic. For how could I have found 54 per cent of cattle vocalising during slaughter when he had heard only one animal bellow? This, he claimed, to the clear astonishment of Senators Siewert and Xenophon, was because the video had been doctored:

I think—I am told editors can be very clever at editing video and putting additional bellows in.

It took me some moments to take in what Caple had just said—he thought the video had been edited and bellows added? I knew how utterly ludicrous this claim was, given how closely involved I had been in the gathering of the footage, how hard it is to effectively dub animal vocalisations and how patronising it was to suggest that I would not have picked this up had it occurred. Even if Caple had not considered my experience analysing animal vocalisations (the focus of my PhD), how could he rely so totally on his inadequate understanding of the technology, and have such unshakable faith in his own observations recorded only on paper?

When I tuned back in to what was happening, the questioner was the Coalition Senator Ian MacDonald, who, after admitting with no apparent embarrassment that he had not actually watched the *Four Corners* program, returned to Caple's allegation:

What I am just interested in, and what you have told us, is a pretty big call of yours. You are suggesting to the committee that the Animals Australia bit of footage that was shown on Four Corners was a fake.

Caple: *It could well have been.*

MacDonald: *It is a pretty big call.*

Caple: *It could well have been.*

It was after 7.00pm by the time Caple's evidence was over. We were all shaken by the course of events and in need of a drink, so Heather, Lyn, Glenys and I headed out of the committee room. Somehow I ended up face to face with Caple as he too left. I managed to say a few words, something about how wrong he was, but he seemed disorientated, and I sped up my pace to get away. Somehow I understood, then, that he

believed completely that *Four Corners* had set him up; he had convinced himself of that. Because he had not seen with his own eyes the cruelty Lyn had filmed, it had not occurred. In that moment I suppose I felt sorry for him.

The extent of the absurdity of what Caple had alleged took some days to digest. He had no track record of questioning the integrity of Animals Australia—indeed Glenys had been a colleague of his on the National Consultative Committee for Animal Welfare for almost a decade and they had worked constructively together on many issues. What on earth had possessed him to think up such an idea? His behaviour was as bizarre as it was upsetting.

Whatever we might have felt about Caple's behaviour, there were others who clearly felt differently. In the 2012 Australia Day honours, Caple received an Order of Australia *for service to veterinary science and education, through national consultative roles on animal welfare and through professional organisations*. In the same year the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) awarded Back the Kendal Oration and Medal at its annual conference. In a speech that ranged from the challenges facing the veterinary profession to the significant health effects of wind turbines, Back finished up by stating that central element of the AVA vision statement should not be about the profession, but the animal, its place in society and the role of veterinarians in supporting its well-being. I am still wondering how the sentiment of putting animals first can ever square up with denying their capacity to have feelings such as fear.

No longer able to reconcile their own views with the AVA's position on live exports (which does not oppose the trade), another group of vets and allied professionals formed Vets Against Live Export (VALE) in 2011. The spokesperson for VALE is Fremantle-based vet Dr Sue Foster. Her willingness to speak out against the trade has helped ensure an alternative independent veterinary view regularly appears in the media and other forums. The formation of VALE has also provided a safe vehicle for people who are themselves unable or afraid to intervene, for fear of losing their jobs, to share their concerns. At a similar time,

four Sydney University graduates, who had been active campaigners on animal welfare issues as students, formed the group Sentient, its aim to help vets to play a role as leading animal advocates. Sentient President Dr Rosemary Elliott is also a vocal opponent of the live export trade. It is fortunate for the veterinary profession, and for the public good, that there are vets who have responded in this way to the events of 2011.

22. THE FATE OF THE MARK 1 BOX

The significance of the Mark 1 box as a cause of widespread cruelty in Indonesian slaughterhouses has never been properly acknowledged by the live export industry. Perhaps this is understandable given that its introduction and use had been endorsed and supported for years by Livecorp, the MLA and senior bureaucrats in the Department of Agriculture. In the four years preceding 2011, over \$1.3 million of government funding had been spent on projects related to the installation of restraint boxes in Indonesia, and by 2011, eleven years after its inception, 103 Mark 1 boxes had been installed in more than 50 different locations. Many more ‘copy’ boxes—makeshift replicas based on the Mark 1 design—had been installed by the Indonesians themselves in slaughterhouses that had not received an Australian version.

The Mark 1 was a prototype design developed in Darwin in 2000 by Geoffrey Beere, a cattle consultant who continues to work in the live export trade to this day. Meat from Australian cattle was being discounted in the Indonesian market due to its poor quality—something that Beere thought could be improved with better restraint during slaughter. The imperative was to come up with a device that was cheap to construct and install, could be made from materials available in Indonesia and did not require power or hydraulics to use. In 2001 the first four Mark 1 boxes were built and installed. In 2003, after serious problems with the operation of the boxes had been identified, a Mark 2 design was proposed which allowed animals to be slowly tilted into a horizontal position rather than tripped onto their side, but it never went further than a prototype. In 2008, modifications were proposed to the Mark 2 design but, instead, a different design based on a rotating calf crush was developed, which became known as the Mark 4.

Meanwhile, under the federal government’s Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership with industry, Mark 1 boxes continued to be built and their use in Indonesia expanded throughout this period, with a further ten installed in 2010. The justification was that their installation, associated with training of slaughtermen, resulted in improved animal

welfare. Yet at the same time, those who knew how the device was used were well aware of its inherent problems and, albeit in impenetrable technical language, documented this in their reports to the industry research and development bodies, and through them to government. On occasion, the fact that the situation in Indonesia was not one the Australian public would be comfortable with was flagged with unusual clarity. In a 2005 MLA and Livecorp report examining opportunities to improve slaughter standards in Indonesia, Geoffrey Beere and Sharon Dundon (now MLA's live export research and development manager) noted:

It is imperative that the joint MLA/Livecorp program have a document prepared and a simple and accurate media response in the event of an overseas or Australian media report on slaughter practices in Indonesia. The media response needs to highlight that considerable progress has been made upgrading abattoir infrastructure over the past 7 years.

By the time *A Bloody Business* was broadcast, the minister had at last come to realise that the Mark 1 box was at the heart of the problem in Indonesia. But the full review of its ongoing appropriateness he had announced just after the program ended was a long time coming, not being completed until August.

An interim report, prepared by Andy Carroll's temporary replacement as Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Bob Biddle, reached Minister Ludwig's desk on the 6th of June, the day before he enforced the suspension. It was everything the Caple report was not: clear and unequivocal in its finding that the Mark 1 box caused avoidable suffering and did not comply even with the OIE slaughter recommendations. It is worth repeating some of the key comments here and considering how it was Caple and his colleagues could have reached such different conclusions:

... the ramp onto which cattle are dropped for restraint has a blood gutter with hard uneven concrete edges. In addition, the animals automatically lift their heads in an attempt to right their bodies (this is a reflex response to being suddenly dropped, particularly where animals are aroused) but because their legs are unable to be retracted (the ropes prevent it) their heads then slam back onto the concrete ramp. This will harm the animals.

The effect of casting animals onto a sloping concrete slab means that this method will inherently result in distress and, in some cases, physical injury.

In the footage provided the animals are actually restrained by two feet and forced to lose their balance down a slope. They are prevented from righting themselves because their weight is hanging on the two roped feet. This also contributes to the animals damaging themselves in their attempts to sit up, as previously described. In our opinion this practice causes avoidable suffering.

The report also made reference to a 2009 MLA report on cattle restraining boxes which included a summary of the key welfare outcomes of each box design against the OIE recommendations. Despite the sanitised way in which it was worded, it is quite clear from this report that the MLA were aware in 2009 that the Mark 1 box did not meet OIE requirements.

At the time, those of us outside the department and the minister's office were unaware of the existence of the interim report. It has only come to light since, through a freedom of information request. In my mind, there is no doubt that it was instrumental in the minister's decision that the cruelty exposed in Indonesia was widespread—enough to justify a suspension in all exports to Indonesia. We had been saying this repeatedly—in fact that was the main point of my report—to demonstrate that it was the mass installation of Mark 1 boxes across Indonesia that was the problem, not just the behaviour of a few people in a handful of abattoirs as the industry had tried to suggest.

The mantra from the industry was that they had never seen cruelty of this type before; if they had seen it they would have stopped it. Perhaps they had not seen anything as horrific and prolonged as the torture of the steer with a broken leg in Medan, but there was no doubt they had seen what a Mark 1 box was designed to do—and even when the process was carried out according to the standard operating procedure, this was unquestionably inhumane.

Despite its clear language, the interim report on the Mark 1 box was not enough to condemn the design completely. After the suspension was announced, we were invited to a meeting with Department of Agriculture officials who outlined their plans for completing the review.

They intended to conduct a field trip to Indonesia for three departmental vets and a representative from the Australian Veterinary Association. To us this had seemed absurd—the evidence indicating the shortcomings of the box was by now so substantial that there was no need for yet another field trip. In the end the trip turned into a farce: the vets arrived in Jakarta following the suspension at a time when the Indonesian government had no appetite for cooperation, and no facility was willing to allow them in, so after waiting for several days the group returned to Australia without stepping foot inside a single abattoir.

Our response to the suggestion that it would take two months to reach a conclusion on the Mark 1 box was to launch a campaign video showing one in action. The video asked people the question: *How long do you have to watch this to know if the Mark 1 box is inhumane?* Most people took less than 3 seconds. We also instigated another letter-writing campaign to Prime Minister Gillard and encouraged veterinarians to provide the government with their informed opinion on the welfare outcomes of the device.

In her typically direct language, Professor Temple Grandin had already denounced the Mark 1 box as *atrocious*—now we consulted Dr Mohan Raj, another internationally renowned slaughter expert, who agreed that the design was seriously inadequate. In a letter to the Prime Minister, he agreed with Grandin that *a system designed to make an animal fall should never be used*, and went on to say that, given that the development of the Mark 4 box could be seen as acknowledgement of welfare problems associated with the Mark 1, *failure to install Mark 4 in all the slaughterhouses is disconcerting and could be seen as negligence*.

The Chief Veterinary Officer's final report, *An assessment of the ongoing appropriateness of Mark 1 and Mark 4 restraint boxes*, was released in late August 2011. The conclusions on the harms caused by the Mark 1 box had changed little in two months: no additional information had been gathered, the planned site visits to see the boxes in use never having eventuated, but none was needed. After everything that had happened since I sat in that ABC cubicle in January, trying to describe on radio the suffering this device inflicted, it was official—the Mark 1 box was

inhumane and would never again be used for the slaughter of Australian animals. Although they were not designed for the slaughter of the relatively docile local cattle, the gnawing question remains how many of these restraint boxes installed in Indonesia continue to be used.

By this time it was Dr Mark Schipp who was acting in the position of Chief Veterinary Officer and who had released the report. Andy Carroll had never returned from sick leave and Schipp was confirmed in the role in October 2011. Thus three of the most senior veterinarians in the government had all agreed that the box was unacceptable. If only one of them had been involved in the original deliberations when funding for the boxes had been discussed, perhaps it would never have been approved. It certainly never should have been. That Caple could have witnessed its use and ever countenanced it is, quite simply, astonishing.

23. THE NEW REGIME

Four months on from *A Bloody Business*, the *Independent Review of Australia's Live Export Trade* conducted by Bill Farmer was released. Immediately dubbed the Farmer review—an unfortunately confusing moniker—the report made fourteen recommendations across three main areas of concern. The first concerned the ‘urgent’ need for state governments to develop nationally consistent animal welfare standards and to implement the programs needed to enforce such standards, something that four years later has yet to be fully acted on. The second flagged changes to the way the preparation of animals and their treatment during export was regulated at the federal level through the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL). A number of issues with ASEL, including problems with animal inspection processes, the system of contracting accredited veterinarians and stockpersons, and the export of sheep from southern ports during winter, were identified. Farmer was clear that a comprehensive review of ASEL was required (in fact the terms of reference for a review had already been agreed in January 2011 but had not been implemented). The third recommendation was already well advanced—the introduction of a supply chain assurance program that required compliance with the recommendations of the OIE. Once again the opportunity to mandate Australian, rather than OIE, standards in our overseas markets was lost. The Farmer recommendations did not include any requirement for stunning, despite that being a key demand of many stakeholders including the RSPCA, the Australian Veterinary Association and the Cattle Council.

There is no denying that, in terms of the potential to improve the treatment of animals in overseas markets, the introduction of the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) was by far the most significant change in government policy to result from the campaign. The extension of exporter responsibility beyond Australia from disembarkation through to the point of slaughter was a huge milestone in the history of the trade. Philip Glyde, who as Deputy Secretary was in charge of the Department of Agriculture’s response to *Four Corners* and a key

architect of the scheme, described it as *the most significant reform the live export industry has ever seen*. Despite continued complaints about the impact of the suspension, both exporters and producers have admitted that ESCAS is the best thing that ever happened to live exports; the key pillar in what they hope will be the trade's ongoing sustainability. David Warriner, President of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association termed ESCAS: *a very positive tool that has saved the live export trade*. The irony behind this statement—the idea that in filming the horrors of Indonesian slaughterhouses, Lyn White could become the saviour of the trade—is not lost on any of us. It seems the moral of this story for the exporters is 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. For those opposing the trade, it's another reminder that 'wins' in animal welfare campaigning are rarely, if ever, seismic shifts but small steps in a long and difficult journey.

The four principles outlined for the recommencement of exports to Indonesia remain as the basis for the ESCAS framework: that animals must be slaughtered and handled in accordance with OIE 'standards'; that exporters are able to control their supply chains and ensure animals remain within them; that animals are traceable from the beginning to the end of the chain; and that supply chains are independently audited. If the journeys animals make overseas were by air, or took no more than a couple of days by sea, if the OIE recommendations were as good as Australian standards, and if ESCAS worked as well as it should, it could be an acceptable system. But the travel times are usually measured in weeks, not days, the handling and slaughter standards frequently inhumane, the only animals that are individually traceable are cattle, leakage from the supply chain is endemic, and ESCAS is often flawed by poor oversight and reporting processes. And then there is the ever-present problem of implementing any system of oversight in another country, beyond our regulatory control. There is one more critical limitation of ESCAS that is often overlooked—it excludes all exports of breeding animals. Thus there are no safeguards for the tens of thousands of dairy heifers exported each year, or indeed any animal an exporter designates as a breeder, once they arrive at their destination. There is no guarantee

that this designation is upheld.

ESCAS is regulated through documentation: exporters are required to submit information to government about the animals they are exporting and each facility they will pass through on the way to slaughter. Facilities must be audited against a checklist which reflects specific recommendations from the relevant OIE chapter. Exports cannot commence until this documentation has been received, so initial audits reflect the potential of facilities to meet the guidelines (before Australian animals are present), while subsequent audits are intended to reflect actual performance (compliance) against the guidelines. The only information that the government receives is whether or not the auditor recorded the facility as compliant—the detail of the audits is known to the exporter, but is not required to be passed on to government. This way the government shields itself from any knowledge of actual practice.

Under this system, a facility could fail multiple audits without the department ever knowing—as long as at one point in time it is assessed as being compliant. For example, let's say when the auditor visits an abattoir, they observe stockmen failing to move animals *calmly and effectively, avoiding harm, distress or injury*, as set out under Article 7.5.2 in the OIE chapter on the slaughter of animals. Instead they observe cattle being yelled at, beaten, slapped, zapped with electric prodders and generally harassed when they are not moving fast enough. Although this means the abattoir is non-compliant, the exporter can ask for another attempt at the audit. This time, the stockmen put down their prodders and sticks, and the auditor ticks the 'compliant' box. The auditor leaves, and the stockmen return to their previous practices. It is perfectly possible for this situation to occur every time there is an audit, with the department none the wiser as all they would see is a summary of the second audit stating the facility was compliant.

Auditors must be accredited with a third-party company (SAI Global is the most prominent of these) which requires them to know how to conduct audits. But assessing compliance with standards where live animals are involved is nothing like auditing a manufacturing plant or business. There is a reason for the aphorism *never work with animals*

or children—neither is guaranteed to behave the way you would expect, even when you know what you should expect. Yet ESCAS auditors are not required to have any specific training in auditing livestock facilities or knowledge of animal husbandry or welfare. Indeed, according to industry feedback, few have any of these skills. Auditors are also selected, employed and paid directly by the exporters, removing any possibility for their reporting to be considered independent.

If it were effectively implemented, ESCAS has the capacity to improve animal welfare in several important ways—firstly, where changes are made to facilities coming into a supply chain to enable them to pass an audit. These changes can be structural (installing new races or slaughter equipment, for example), or procedural, such as training of workers in low stress livestock handling techniques. The system should also ensure animals do not leave the supply chain, thus protecting them from substandard treatment elsewhere. And the ongoing audit process should provide an assurance that the standards set out on paper are being met, at least at the time of the audit.

The problem is that the system relies completely on the authenticity of the information provided by exporters. There is no government oversight or capacity to inspect overseas facilities. In another sovereign country any such system would be difficult to enforce—ESCAS is already acknowledged as stretching the regulatory reach of government to its limits. Attempting to control animal welfare outcomes in other countries is fundamentally problematic and there are enormous challenges in terms of measuring and enforcing compliance, or investigating possible breaches of standards or the loss of animals from supply chains. Indeed the regulator has stated that: *it is not known how well the recorded non-compliance rate reflects the true non-compliance rate—it is not known what proportion of non-compliance is detected and reported*. When ‘non-compliances’ have been identified, the response of the department (both the instigator and regulator of the system) has been to impose new conditions on the exporter involved. Even then, these conditions cannot guarantee the problem will not recur. In not one case so far have even multiple major non-compliances resulted in the removal of an

exporter's licence or in any criminal prosecutions. The government itself acknowledges that: *in part, this reflects the difficulties in pursuing criminal action against an exporter for a breach of animal welfare standards occurring in another country and involving third parties outside of Australia's regulatory control.* Another possible, even likely, reason is a lack of will or resources in pursuing such action on the part of the Coalition government.

Let's pose another disturbingly possible hypothetical. An auditor fails to visit a facility but, because of industry pressure or corruption, marks it as compliant anyway. Their report is signed and sent off to Canberra. In the absence of any government oversight of actual facilities, how would anyone ever know? In foreign countries where money commonly changes hands to facilitate business and bureaucratic processes, there can be no certainty of the integrity of those processes.

I write this as someone who has yet to set foot inside an ESCAS-approved abattoir. There are few people from outside the industry who have, since one of the consequences of 2011 is that security and concern over unfamiliar visitors in facilities receiving Australian animals has dramatically increased. (Such footage as does emerge, is usually of animals sold and slaughtered outside the protection ESCAS should afford.) So I cannot accurately say how good or bad are the outcomes for Australian livestock that remain within the system, but despite all the claims government makes for ESCAS, neither can the regulator. This is the point—Australians are prevented from knowing what is happening to our animals.

The enticing prospect of exporting two million sheep a year to Saudi Arabia, a country which has refused to accept a system that requires the Australian government to approve their facilities, has been the likely catalyst for industry proposing its own regulatory system. This system, the *Global Assurance Program*, transfers the approval process from government to an industry-owned company complete with its own auditing and reporting processes. However, the standards under the program are no better than ESCAS (yet again the opportunity to mandate stunning has been lost) and do not cover the selection and preparation of livestock or the voyage from Australia—all aspects which the Farmer review identified

would be enhanced by a proper quality assurance process. The inevitable structural problem here, of course, is self-regulation, an approach that has so consistently failed in the past. Inadequate standards are one issue; compliance, even with those, is another.

Setting aside for a moment the question of what the real rate of compliance with ESCAS itself is, or the fact that thousands of animals are known to have been allowed to leak from supply chains to face treatment potentially just as horrific as documented in Indonesia, it is worth reflecting on what compliance itself actually entails. For the majority of sheep it involves a series of inescapable stresses ending in a painful death: being trucked to an assembly depot, mixed with thousands of other sheep, trucked and loaded onto ships, crowded into pens for weeks on end with no bedding and only unfamiliar pellets to eat, offloaded and transferred into holding yards, trucked to abattoirs and slaughtered while fully conscious. This is a far cry from the internationally accepted animal welfare principle that livestock should be slaughtered humanely (that is with prior stunning) as close as possible to their point of production.

24. THE BACKLASH

The election of the Abbott government in 2013 and the appointment of Barnaby Joyce as Minister for Agriculture cemented a clear change in rhetoric about the live export trade. The central issue moved decisively from reducing cruelty to compensating for income loss—farmers replaced cattle as the victims of the previous three years. The new government also brought an almost immediate and decisive reduction in the consideration of animal welfare issues in Australia. Well ahead of this change, elements of the media had shifted focus in a similar way, telling stories of farmers harmed by the trade suspension, attacking hypocritical do-gooders who failed to understand our collective responsibility to feed the poor of Asia with Australian cattle. The initial disturbed response from many Coalition members of parliament to the cruelty revealed by *A Bloody Business* was replaced by concern for their natural constituency in agriculture. This shift became magnified by the hard line taken by their leadership and by the fiercer rhetoric already prevalent in the media.

In a piece written in *The Herald Sun*, a year before the Abbott government came to power, Ed Gannon typified the hardening formulations used to counter opposition to the trade:

Demand for meat will always be there. If Australia halts the export of live animals to these countries, there will be only one outcome. They will get their animals from other countries... It would seem the protests we are seeing at the moment are really calling for Australia to stop the live exports. If that happened, the level of cruelty will rise. That is a fact.

Such an assertion, argued with the gross assumption that meat can only be supplied through the export of live animals, also exaggerates the ability of other countries to step into these markets, especially in the case of cattle. Brazil and Uruguay, the two main live cattle exporters after Australia, have limited ability to supply Asian markets. In any case, as with Australia, their main product is beef which they already export to the region as well as into China, the Middle East, and Russia.

An editorial written in *The Australian* soon after the 2013 election

crystallised the sort of justification for the trade that defined the new paradigm:

Many of the countries where Australian exporters have carved out a significant market advantage observe different cultural customs, often based on religious teachings. It is wrong for Australians to try to force their views on to others.

It went on to argue that the industry, backed by government and advised by welfare experts, had already worked to improve standards and minimise suffering, and that this process could continue.

In opposition the Coalition team had, as has already been seen, voiced increasingly strident versions of these same attitudes. In government it moved in lockstep with the backlash commentary. Prime Minister Abbott made the trip to Indonesia where he claimed that a panicked reaction to a television program had caused the previous government to suspend the trade. In this context it has to be remembered that in 2006 another conservative administration, the Howard government, suspended live exports to Egypt after the release of footage of cruelty at the Basateen Abattoir. It was four years (compared to five weeks for Indonesia) before exports to Egypt resumed. Apart from anything else, this shift away from concern for animal welfare in the conservative parties is evidence of how much the consideration for societal values in Australian politics have been degraded.

As the new Minister, Barnaby Joyce began stating—it became something of a mantra—that his job was to increase returns at the farm gate, just as the government shut down every one of its advisory working groups and committees that included the words *animal welfare* in its title. It had also been the Howard government that set up these bodies under the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy. The connection between trade success and animal welfare reputation was appreciated then, an understanding that the Abbott government aggressively cast aside (and which, as Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull has, as yet, done nothing to reaffirm). Such myopia betrays a serious failure to think beyond the outcomes of the immediate financial year. As has already been argued here, good governance builds long-term financial security through

supporting sustainable, ethical practices that create a positive reputation for an industry.

The minister's drive to increase returns for producers has led to a concerted push to expand the trade into new markets. On the resumption of live exports to Bahrain in 2014, Joyce said: *Every sheep on this boat is a reflection of someone who is getting a cheque back to their kitchen table... it is a good trade and I stand behind it.* The trajectory of his rhetoric continued unabated into 2015 when he stated in a press release: *If it's protein and walks on four legs or hops on two and is bigger than a guinea pig then we are going to try and find a market for it.*

New voices outside the government have also been heard advocating the trade, strident among them that of cross-bench Senator and agri-business commentator David Leyonhjelm. In various opinion pieces he has argued against what he sees as the xenophobia, ignorance and racism implicit in criticism of the trade. He describes:

...the hypocrisy of Animal [sic] Australia which, with the connivance of the ABC, finds it outrageous that importing countries do not share our values in relation to animal welfare but remains silent about their human rights failures including the ill treatment of women and persecution of Christians.

The misrepresentation of the ABC in this comment is followed by the totally unreasonable expectation that an organisation with a specific role, in this case defending animal welfare, should actively pursue other issues of social justice. Here we have the ludicrous counsel that everyone should do everything at once, regardless of their expertise. One can only imagine Leyonhjelm as a future prime minister, conflating all aspects of policy in every task he undertook. He concluded his arguments with this statement: *As a former veterinarian, I know a bit about animal welfare.* It is strange how some members of veterinary profession, including Senators Leyonhjelm and Back, step in to defend practices that the animal welfare movement finds intolerable.

The serious oversight in all the backlash propaganda, as well as the actions of the Coalition government, is the failure to deal even with the economic structural issues inherent in the trade, let alone the ethical ones. Opportunism, with its concentration on short-term profits, has

meant that the trade has evolved without regard for consequences such as the closure of northern abattoirs, so that graziers have been left with no alternative but to turn off their stock for finishing in the Indonesian feedlots. As we have already seen, a cycle of vulnerability is set up, further accentuated by the relatively poor carrying capacity of the land, the high cost of supplementary feeding, and transport of cattle during the wet season often being impossible. Producers becoming hostage to so inflexible a business model means that their only recourse is to call for political protection. Government, rather than attempting to solve these long-term problems, has helped entrench them.

At the same time that the newly elected Coalition government's rhetoric and decisions were seeking to minimise the influence of animal welfare organisations, the industry was attempting to redefine itself in order to appear to meet community expectations of its animal welfare responsibilities. Prior to the 2013 election, the Rudd government had announced funding for a series of 'social licence workshops' commissioned by ALEC and run by the management consultancy firm Futureye. This was a response to commentary that the industry had lost its 'social licence' to operate—defined as the intangible consent a community gives when an activity has broad social approval—a term new to exporters but one rapidly absorbed and repeated by them. These taxpayer-funded workshops helped develop a strategy to re-establish public legitimacy for the industry. (Apparently, even after all that had happened, some exporters needed an outside agency to point out that the public did not like what they did.) Two predictable messages were then pushed through the media. The first was that Australian live exports feed our region and are essential for its food security. The second was that by engaging in this way with other, less developed, countries we improve animal welfare there, and that Australia is the only country attempting to make such improvements.

Such claims have already been considered in the course of this book, the food security issue being largely an argument of convenience, particularly considering that most of these markets have traditionally been low consumers of animal protein. Australian agriculture is attempting to

create larger markets in these countries, markets that the meat trade could meet without the welfare failures endemic to live exports. Compromised arguments about our responsibility to feed our neighbours—when this doesn't require live animals and where, for instance, Indonesia is trying to become self-sufficient in beef production—would have far less traction in our public discourse were it not for political leaders furthering them. Economic opportunity being used as a justification for almost anything is all too common in Australian politics. Similarly, the argument of being there to improve welfare is a false assertion. In much the same manner, Nike established factories in Southeast Asia to take advantage of low wage structures there and, when criticised for running sweatshops, then claimed that it was working to improve employment standards. All such tactics really prove is the determination of these industries to invent *post hoc* ethical self-justifications for their business models. Without long-term practical and ethical planning, many of the aggressive initiatives of the cattle industry will fail, leaving Australia further behind in our search for sustainable prosperity.

A more detailed examination of the second of these industry arguments—that without our intervention no improvements in welfare would happen—is worth making here, using the Mark 1 box as an example. By 2011 Australia had already been exporting cattle into Indonesia for many years, expanding its reach into over one hundred abattoirs, yet with one or two exceptions the animals' treatment during slaughter was inhumane. As has been seen, the installation of Mark 1 boxes resulted in institutionalised cruelty and even this failed attempt to improve slaughter management was targeted only at Australian animals. With no need for the use of restraint boxes in handling the more docile local cattle, the hypocrisy of industry claims is transparent. Exporters created their own mess then claimed to be white knights solving another country's problems. Not until after *A Bloody Business* was it considered possible by government to institute standards in importing countries. Only extreme pressure from the animal welfare movement brought any change of this sort.

Of course, we don't have to sell animals into a country to be able

to help welfare there. The government-funded Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research exports our expertise in animal husbandry without having to link this with live export. The Centre is attempting to assist Indonesia improve the genetics of its cattle herd, an aim that might appear to contradict our drive to increase exports but is relatively uncompromised by ulterior motives. Australia, as an advanced agricultural country, has an important role in promoting technological improvements in farming in our region. This offers a real contribution to food security. Claims that other live exporting countries will simply replace us if we withdraw from these markets make no difference to our ability to deliver aid and willingly work for such improvements for animals from any country, whether we export there or not.

The grab-bag of expedient arguments in defence of the trade arises from the political imperative to increase export income, exporters' determination to further their lucrative business model, and pressure from producers for their incomes to be safeguarded. In the months, then years, following the suspension in 2011, the clamour from farmers has grown in tandem with that of the media and the present government. Paul Shoker, a horticulturalist from the mid-north coast of New South Wales, and a member of NSW Farmers, wrote an opinion piece in *The Australian* in May 2015 in response to a *Four Corners* program on the exploitation of workers in our meat and horticultural industries. Its general tenor was that the small proportion of farmers who flout Australia's system of standards should be pursued and prosecuted, but that added red tape only damaged the great majority of honest producers. While this may be a justifiable argument, Shoker also attacked the ABC for bias, and connected his argument to live exports and *A Bloody Business* in this way:

The Labor government's knee-jerk reaction to ban live cattle exports to Indonesia resulted in cattle being shot in the paddocks and left to rot.

What did animal activists, who helped the ABC with the show, actually achieve? The mass slaughter of cattle.

Four Corners reports such as these will always play well to metro audiences and inner-city elites. But for those of us in the bush, it is a real kick in the guts

by a public broadcaster that claims to represent them.

Along with the attempt to delegitimise the views of urban Australians (imagine the reaction if the animal welfare lobby attempted to dismiss the views of farmers as *back-block rednecks*), this type of rhetoric only undermines the producer's case. There is no evidence of the mass slaughter of cattle in Australian paddocks. Where animals were shot in the aftermath of the ban, the effects of prolonged drought and over-grazing were more serious contributors to such decisions than the ban itself. While it is true that producers' expectations they would be able to sell their animals to the live trade were temporarily blocked by the federal government, the government did offer compensation to those who were affected and the trade returned to pre-suspension levels within three months. It is a terrible truth that of the millions of cattle slaughtered in Indonesia under conditions condoned and promoted by the industry, most would have been ensured a better fate had they been shot in the paddock. This is a startling and distressing conclusion but an unavoidable one. Of course, the damage to the incomes of the producers in such a situation would also be terrible, but here we have the true division of interests in this issue clearly revealed. If farmers are seen as the victims, then the trade is excusable. If animal welfare is considered, then the trade is inexcusable. Reconciling these interests is the essential challenge: to protect farmers and their stock by entrenching humane practices in agriculture.

The pressure for secure farm income is perfectly reasonable and understandable. The case this book puts forward, though, is that such security is far better provided by long-term planning based on sound ethics than it is by opportunistic response to market forces. That farmers have come to be seen as the victims of the suspension is less understandable and indicative of systemic failure within the industry even more than within government.

Blaming government for unreasonably suspending the trade to Indonesia has led to the ongoing class action by some producers against former Minister Ludwig and the Commonwealth government. The producers' case (which came after prolonged negotiations behind the

scenes over a possible out-of-court settlement), asserts that, following the minister's decision to stop exports to twelve abattoirs soon after *A Bloody Business*, he had no new evidence to justify fully suspending the trade a week later. (This assertion is made despite the minister having received during that week the interim report which stated that the Mark 1 box was inhumane.) Extraordinarily, the statement of claim not only argues that the minister's decision was precipitate, but also asserts that the treatment of cattle in Indonesia was humane. It uses the Caple report as important evidence to support this assertion. I hardly need describe my incredulity at such an argument, having analysed in detail the deep inadequacies of that report and of the conduct of slaughter in Indonesia. The statement of claim also goes so far as to defend the Mark 1 box. It further argues that cruelty in Indonesian slaughterhouses in 2011 was not inherent but only present at the sites subject to the initial ban.

This is another patently ridiculous claim—Lyn visited abattoirs that we knew about either through the Caple report or various MLA reports, but she also followed leads as she went, based simply on the proximity of the next facility or information she picked up about their whereabouts. Her selection was not determined by any particular negative reputation of a slaughterhouse and in these terms was random. Every place she visited revealed inhumane treatment. How could it be argued that these were all exceptional, and that every other slaughterhouse in Indonesia that she did not visit was perfectly run, when all but four facilities (already using stunning) were using Mark 1 boxes, copy boxes or, worse still, dragging cattle to the floor with ropes and knives?

The political nature of the class action is further underlined by its backing by the National Farmers Federation's Australian Farmers Fighting Fund. Initially, back in the mid-1980s, the Fund was used as a tool for legal and industrial enforcement against the meat workers union (AMIEU) in a major dispute at the Mudginberri abattoir. The natural connection between producer organisations and the Liberal and National Parties is further borne out by former NFF leaders Ian McLachlan and Andrew Robb becoming ministers in Coalition administrations.

Key here, of course, is that the suspension of the trade was the decision of a Labor government. Lost in the politics are real arguments that the government failed to demand enough of industry and failed to examine the repercussions likely from so unregulated an aspect of Australia's trade overseas. While this was a serious inadequacy, the participants in that trade, who often rail against the red tape of government regulation, must accept greater responsibility. Nonetheless, it is a serious failure of governance in this country that, instead of developing long-term policies that improve the reputation of our agricultural industries, we have blindly pursued short-term benefits whatever their collateral cost. (This is as true of environmental factors as it is of welfare.) In the process, whenever the income of farmers suffers, we characterise them as victims, but not victims of our decision-making habits. Anything that gets in the way of supporting those victims, no matter how important, tends to be dismissed.

There has been a further element in the backlash, one raised in Parliament. Senator Back, responding to the focus on industry failure brought about by activist filming of animal welfare breaches in Australia, has attempted through a private senator's bill to introduce 'ag-gag' legislation. The bill combines the notion that the gathering of such evidence on private property is an illegal intrusion (thereby attempting to create new offences around these actions) with the requirement that any photographic evidence obtained must be reported within one business day in order to prevent the cruelty continuing. What this attempts to do is turn the person filming animal cruelty into the criminal, rather than its perpetrator. It also ignores any requirement for anyone witnessing cruelty in the course of their work to report it. While Back's bill is aimed at 'infringements' within Australia, the motivation for it is likely to have stemmed, at least in part, from the power of Lyn's Indonesian footage and the continuing evidence collected in importing countries of ESCAS breaches.

All these various factors combine to validate the view that economic expediency is the prime force in the management of animal agriculture in this country. While the right of farmers to make a living needs to be

protected, it can only be repeated and underlined that this right must be underpinned by both ethical farming practice and government policy.

25. WASTED OPPORTUNITIES

It took until July 2012 for the Labor government to act on the Farmer Review's recommendations relating to the Australian part of the live export supply chain. Farmer had found that ASEL—the standards applying to livestock from leaving the farm through to leaving the ship—and the committee charged with providing advice on their implementation, LESAG (the Live Export Standards Advisory Group), should be reviewed. At the same time, the ship-side inspection regime at Fremantle, which Farmer had been none too impressed by, was also to be examined. After an exchange of letters between Minister Ludwig, the Department of Agriculture and the RSPCA, it was decided that because of the technical nature of the work I would be the RSPCA's representative on both committees.

I've spent a lot of my working life sitting around tables arguing the case for animals, but immediately felt that the Fremantle Inspection Review Committee was different. For a start, we were going to see facilities for ourselves and interview people rather than only taking written submissions. We began the process in Perth, and the first table we sat around was in the hotel restaurant over breakfast. The committee itself was small, only five of us, but we were joined by a number of support staff from the department, including Lynn Simpson, one of the two on-board vets Lyn White and I had met in Canberra in February 2011. It was encouraging to know that someone with such extensive voyage experience was now working for the government to improve export standards and, from what I knew of Simpson, she would bring a wealth of practical experience and some refreshing plain speaking to the committee. I was not wrong about either expectation, but had no idea how much I would eventually value her involvement.

At the government's expense, our group had flown to Western Australia to see in action the processes for inspecting individual animals as 'fit to export'. We started at a pre-export assembly depot, or registered premises, just south of Fremantle, where tens of thousands of sheep were waiting to be transferred to the port. Not that the sheep had any idea

they were waiting for anything. If these sheep were thinking of anything particular, I imagine it was about where the grass had gone. When we arrived there were a couple of livestock trucks unloading the latest arrivals; as the sheep filed from the trucks they were drafted into pens ready to be moved into one of the many sheds that housed most of the 70,000 animals the depot could hold. Each shed held 5,000 sheep, penned in groups of around 600. These pens had feed troughs and drinkers, but nothing else. The textured metal grid floor on which the sheep stood (and would later sleep on) was raised off the ground so their urine and droppings could fall through. The remainder of the sheep were held in a couple of dusty bare paddocks at the back of the premises—there was no grass to be seen there either.

As we walked through one of the sheds, the sheep crowded to the far side, nervous of our invasion into their space, and it struck me how easily the sense of these animals as individuals could be lost by their handlers. Yet looking at them more closely, small differences between them became obvious: one a little skinnier than the next, one with a seeping eye irritation, another a little further away holding his leg awkwardly. How much time would it take to assess every animal to this extent? This question was crucial to the purpose of the committee's work. As they were being loaded, how did the ship-side veterinarians and stockmen inspect tens of thousands of animals against over twenty specific criteria to determine whether they were 'fit to export'? I had always suspected that loading rates were simply too fast to be able to pick up on any but the most obvious injuries, so was eager to see this first hand. But much to our frustration, no sheep were loaded while we were in Fremantle—delays in the exporter gaining the necessary government approvals meant no sheep could leave the depot while we were there. We did, however, get to the wharf when cattle were being loaded. I stood by the drafting race as a line of six-month-old steers rushed past; the supervising vet next to me determining their fate by letting them run through to the ramp, or quickly pushing a gate across the race to block their path. Anything that looked suspect from the side where he stood was drafted off into a small holding pen. If they didn't pass muster then

they were returned to the truck, destined for euthanasia or the abattoir. Otherwise it was back through the race and up onto the ship.

The time in Fremantle was intense—we met and listened to producers, transporters, exporters, vets and departmental officials as they shared their thoughts on the trade in general and how well, or poorly, the transport, loading and inspection processes currently worked. In the Town Hall in Fremantle we talked to councillors about their concerns about the trade, its impact on the city, and their opposition to the port moving south to Kwinana, out of the sight and awareness of the public. We also talked to Dawn Lowe, from the watchdog group Animals' Angels, who was a regular fixture at the port. She had spent day after day for ten years patiently monitoring and photographing through the bars of the security gate the loading of export ships, determined to provide some independent scrutiny of the process. (Sometime later she rang me to say that exporters had been successful in preventing anyone from the public gaining access into this area of the port.)

Simpson, having worked as a stevedore on the Fremantle wharf to help pay her way through vet school at Murdoch University, and then as the on-board vet on fifty-seven voyages, knew most of the people we spoke to. Her input was invaluable—she helped explain what we were seeing, filling in the gaps and answering questions, throwing in new nuggets of information as she went along. For the first time I began to have some confidence that we might actually be able to improve things on the ground. In the few minutes I'd watched the young vet inspecting cattle being loaded, one suspect steer had slipped through too quickly for the gate to be closed. That everything happened too fast was obvious, but with races designed so that animals could only be viewed from one side there was more to do than just slow down the line.

A few days after we got back from Perth, there was a hastily arranged return trip—this time travelling via Adelaide. The setup in Adelaide had the individual inspection of sheep take place at the assembly depot, with a follow-up check on the wharf. We didn't make it in time to visit the depot, but stood on the wharf watching as sheep came off trucks backed up to a sand-covered pen that could hold several hundred sheep set up

next to the ship. The idea was that major problems would be picked up by the vet watching as the sheep ran from the ramp to the far end of the pen. Suspect sheep were caught by hand and dragged off to a reject pen on the side. When the gate at the far end was opened, the mob surged up the ramp onto the ship. The emptied trucks then drove off, with the next in line backing up in their place. It was late evening, dark, with the loading area illuminated with floodlights. But the brightest lights came from the ship itself, its white-painted framework of decks towering above us, each one soon to be packed with thousands of Australian sheep.

The next day we were back in Western Australia at the assembly depot we'd visited the previous week, watching more sheep being loaded for the short trip to Fremantle. This time it was clear how little the export manager wanted me there, reprimanding me for not asking for permission as I pulled out my camera. Everyone else was taking photographs without question. We moved on fairly quickly to our main destination where we would finally get to see the inspection process. Here the individual inspection took place at the wharf, using specially designed trailers that connected the trucks to the vessel loading ramp through a series of raceways. Having the inspection here meant unfit sheep could end up travelling to the wharf before having a chance of being picked out, and it took away any second chance to reject them before loading. The inspectors (stockmen or vets) stood next to the raceway while a stockman on the platform drafted out any rejects as directed. The speed that the sheep ran through was crucial as was the need to keep watching—any distraction, such as turning to exchange a comment with the stevedore counting the sheep, and you'd miss one or two sheep as they ran past. The view was side-on so unless the drafter was paying the same level of attention, problems only visible from the far side would not be picked up.

The final trip we took was to Portland, a town on the blustery far west of the Victorian coast, the farthest east of the three ports where sheep are still loaded for export. The majestic line of turbines along the scenic drive indicated how much wind is a feature of this area. In 1983,

when wind and driving rain combined to drop the temperature to dangerous levels, 15,000 recently shorn sheep died from exposure in the paddocks here while waiting to be exported to the Middle East. It was to these same paddocks that we were now headed.

The four vets and I, the sole animal welfare scientist in our group, gathered at the first depot which held 30,000 sheep. Across from the yards, around 150 sheep that had been drafted out of the group due to poor health or body condition were being held in a 'reject' paddock. As we walked closer it became obvious that several were badly lame. That any injured sheep were present, especially some with suspected broken legs, was an unexpected shock. Being unfit for transport, these sheep should have been euthanased as soon as their injuries were picked up. That they had been left there, even though the feedlot owners and manager had known we were coming, indicated that we had seen nothing out of the ordinary. Indeed we soon learnt their routine was to leave the 'rejects' until after the feedlot had been emptied, when the abattoir truck would then take them up to Ararat, a two-hour drive inland. It seemed shocking too that the department's veterinarian had visited just the day before to conduct a health assessment of the flock, but had apparently not checked the reject pen because these sheep would not be exported. I asked how often the Victorian Department of Agriculture sent an animal welfare inspector to the feedlot; neither the manager nor the vet had ever seen one.

There was no avoiding the fact that the injured sheep should not be left to suffer any longer, so we stopped our inspection while those that could be caught were shot in the paddock. The rest of the mob was then brought through the yards and the lame ones drafted out. This wretched process did at least allow us to see sheep moving through the race as they would during an inspection. This time we were standing on the same level so the view was down the race; with two people you could see each sheep clearly from the front, but the solid wooden sides of the race meant this was the only view.

We stayed in our motel for two more nights, discussing our findings and working on the committee's final report while we waited for the

ship to start loading so we could watch the inspection process at the feedlot. But with each day it became less likely we would be able to see what we had come for. A paperwork issue back in Canberra was blamed, but Simpson and I began to suspect that there was more to it. After the embarrassment of the reject sheep, it seemed more and more likely that the exporters were out to make sure we saw as little as possible. As we ate dinner with the other committee members in a waterfront restaurant, we watched aghast as a different livestock carrier left port—we had not even been told that cattle were being loaded all the time we had been there.

Despite our various setbacks, the committee was able to gather enough information to make some clear recommendations. Four of these in particular arose as a direct result of what we had witnessed during our visits. First, that animal welfare inspectors should have free access throughout the live export chain. Second, that the point where animals are individually inspected should be the registered premises (rather than the wharf). Third, that the inspection process must allow each animal to be reliably assessed against all of the ASEL rejection criteria. And finally, that facilities are in place at every stage to allow animals unfit for transport to be removed from the supply chain.

These visits were the first time I had been able to see sheep and cattle in the live export supply chain first hand, something that became invaluable in the work of the second committee I was involved in—the one charged with reviewing ASEL. There were no site visits proposed this time: most of our discussions took place in the department around the same table where I had sat two years earlier listening to Professor Caple expound on his trip to Indonesia. It felt different now. The public servants in the committee secretariat knew much more about the realities of the trade, and as a result they seemed keen to ensure the review made real progress. Having Simpson involved gave us expertise in the actual implementation of the standards and a perspective from someone who had already identified many of their flaws during her fifty-seven voyages, and had been reporting issues back to the department since 2001.

One of the first steps in the committee process was to call for submissions from anyone who had an interest in the issues covered by the standards and how they worked—from members of the public, to government officers involved in regulating the standards, to the exporters themselves. It was clear that for those working in the export trade to be able to make an honest and frank submission, their identity would need to be kept confidential, not just from the public but from the committee itself, as the members included an exporter representative as well as ALEC's Alison Penfold. I was particularly interested to hear from veterinarians responsible for the health and welfare of livestock on-board ship (although vets do not travel on voyages of less than ten days) as they were on the receiving end of what we had seen in Fremantle, Adelaide and Portland. What did they think of the current standards? Did they share Simpson's concerns? In the end the committee received submissions from six accredited live export veterinarians. The identity of one of these was not kept from the committee as it would have been obvious to us anyway—Lynn Simpson.

Simpson included in her submission something that no other export vet had been brave enough to include: multiple photographs of conditions on actual voyages. Not sanitised publicity photos of shiny new pens devoid of any animals, but images that depicted the reality of what the trade meted out to its live cargo: cattle crammed into pens unable to lie down together; cattle coated in faecal slurry lying down in its thick brown mess; young steers and heifers curled up on top of each other in the corner of a pen; sheep in the open deck exposed to all weather; unshorn horned sheep pushed up against the sides of a packed pen; cattle with deep leg abrasions resulting from kneeling on the rough non-slip flooring; a heavy bull with joints so badly injured he had gone down and refused to stand again; lambs and calves born on-board ship despite their mothers being certified as not pregnant; contaminated water troughs; and exposed drains oozing slurry onto animals on the deck below.

There were also photos of better conditions showing what could be done when livestock had greater value: breeding cattle in apparent

excellent health with plenty of space to move around; others in recently cleaned pens relaxing on a deep layer of fresh bedding.

Simpson's submission did not argue against the trade but she used her experience to offer practical suggestions for better education of stockmen, veterinarians and crew, and for changes to the standards to help prevent and better treat problems when they arose. Indeed the reason she had joined the department was to work in a policy environment where she could help improve outcomes for all exported animals, not just the ones she could directly assist as an on-board vet.

In February 2013, submissions to the ASEL review were uploaded onto the department's website. Although having already provided the option for submissions to be treated as confidential, the department made a further internal decision, without consultation, that none of the submissions written by registered accredited vets or departmental officers were to be made public. However Simpson's submission was uploaded, with her name included. Exactly who made this decision and whether it was a mistake or intentional, remains unclear. The photos it contains have since been widely distributed: there are none like them from any other source. But whatever might have been gained in improving the transparency of the industry came at a very personal cost to Simpson herself.

I can't write anything about the conversation that took place at the next meeting when I was shocked to learn that Simpson had been removed from the secretariat, because I signed a confidentiality document as a requirement of being a committee member. In any government department it is up to the executive staff to decide which officers attend meetings or provide support to particular committees. But it seemed particularly counter-productive to exclude the one person who had specific expertise in the application of the ASEL from a committee that was tasked with improving these standards, especially as Simpson's expertise had just been recognised by her being made a permanent employee of the department only a few weeks earlier. Why was she removed by her superiors as an adviser to the committee? It remains a question whether influence was brought to bear to silence the knowledge and evidence

she contributed to this process, evidence that revealed stark inadequacies in the selection and transport of our animals overseas.

As I write this two years later, I have come to know Lynn Simpson well. She is still in dispute with the department over her appalling treatment following the release of her submission. Soon after being removed from the secretariat, she was also told it would no longer be possible for her to work in the animal welfare branch, or in any area related to live exports, and she was offered a position dealing with cat and dog import permits, all the time being assured that she had done absolutely nothing wrong. By this time it was clear she was seen as a pariah by the live export industry because of the content of her submission, while at the same time the department had made it completely impossible for her to tackle any of the problems she had been recruited to address. Meaningful employment for someone with very specific expertise is hard to find at the best of times, but it is a bleak proposition when you are suddenly denied any chance to pursue your goals in your chosen field. Already suffering from the after-effects of a series of harrowing experiences at sea, Lynn was put on long-term sick leave. And so began a slow and torturous process of extricating herself from the public service whilst trying to regain a sense of purpose and some financial compensation for the ruining of her career.

The committee meetings, with or without Lynn's technical input, were a hard slog. It must be obvious by this point that progress in animal welfare requiring any change to the status quo is hard won and gains are only ever made when there is science on your side (sadly the reverse is not true when defending the status quo). But by the end of the process we had a draft that was a significant improvement over the previous version of ASEL, although that the most important issues such as stocking densities and bedding requirements were presented as *options* rather than prescribed changes. We had a deadline of the end of May 2013 to provide a report to the department's internal Livestock Export Reform Program Implementation Board. The report recommended that the new version of the standards be prepared for public consultation. The Board accepted the recommendations; it was now up to the minister to

approve them.

In June 2013, the Labor leadership spill brought Kevin Rudd back as Prime Minister and Rudd supporter Joel Fitzgibbon replaced Joe Ludwig as the Minister for Agriculture. Not surprisingly, the ASEL Review was not on the top of his list as he took over the job, and there was little time for it to gain any of his attention. On the 5th of August, Rudd called an election and the government went into caretaker mode.

As the election campaign reached full swing, unbeknown to us another live export disaster was about to unfold in the Persian Gulf. On the 17th of August, in typical cold winter temperatures, 44,713 sheep were being loaded onto the *Bader* in Adelaide. The vessel then moved on to Fremantle to add a further 30,795 sheep before setting off for Doha, Qatar. As the ship crossed the equator into the northern hemisphere summer, the temperature began to climb, reaching the mid-30s. Daily mortalities up to 20 days into the voyage were in single figures, low for a long-haul sheep voyage. But then something went horribly wrong. It was federal election day in Australia when the ship arrived at Doha, and, as Australians were voting Tony Abbott into office, over 3,000 sheep on board the *Bader* were suffering the final fatal stages of heat stress. By the time the vessel had finished unloading the death toll was 4,168. According to the official report no ventilation problems were found: 97 per cent of sheep deaths were attributed to heat stress due to *extreme weather conditions*. Yet there was nothing extreme about the temperature in Doha at that time—it regularly reaches into the 40s in the summer months. Exactly why so many sheep died in such a short time still remains a mystery, but the risks of exporting to the Middle East in the middle of the Australian winter are well documented: the risk of merino sheep suffering heat stress is just too high, a fact that had already been raised in several submissions to the ASEL review.

It was also while the government was in caretaker mode that I discovered that the online links to the ASEL submissions had been removed from the department's website, a strange move given that public servants at this time are supposed to avoid making any controversial decisions. I wrote to the Animal Welfare Branch to ask why and was told

the decision was *because of the images included in some of the submissions. In particular, images of animal cruelty that may cause distress to some people, especially children, who may access information from our website.*

Lynn's submission was the only one that contained images that could *cause distress to some people* and these were all of animals exported under conditions compliant with ASEL—something the department was now labelling *animal cruelty*. Their sudden concern for the welfare of children who might happen across the department's website was not convincing. Removing Lynn's submission was just one more step in denying her expertise and erasing her existence from the department.

Two-and-a-half years into the Abbott-Turnbull government's term, there was still no action to progress the review of ASEL or to implement the changes recommended by the Fremantle Inspection Review Report. The draft version of ASEL that could have led to substantial improvements for exported animals is now just another file in the department's vast electronic archives. With the stripping away of animal welfare from the department's responsibilities and the closure of the animal welfare branch, there are few left who were involved in its drafting and who would understand its significance. As far as I am aware, the flawed inspection processes at Portland, Adelaide and Fremantle remain unchanged. It is likely that there are still sick and lame sheep suffering for days in export premises as they wait for the abattoir truck to arrive. And the catalogue of serious on-board welfare issues continues, including exported sheep and cattle being crammed into pens at densities that prevent them from all lying down at the same time. Those vets who cared enough to risk their future employment and make a submission to the review process, and anyone else working for exporters with concerns about animal welfare issues, have been sent a strong warning against speaking out in the future. What has happened to Lynn Simpson could happen to them. Yet, in the face of all this evidence of inaction, obfuscation and coercion some people still expect the public and the RSPCA to swallow the idea that the government and the live export industry have animal welfare as their priority.

26. ONGOING CRUELTY

Throughout the writing of this book, new evidence has continued to surface of the inhumane treatment of our livestock exported to other countries. In August 2012, 20,000 Australian sheep on the *Ocean Drover* were rejected by authorities in Bahrain, purportedly due to concerns over scabby mouth. The exporter, Wellard Rural Exports, requested permission from the Department of Agriculture to vary its export arrangements and unload the sheep in Pakistan instead. This required the submission of new documentation and approvals, which were accepted by the Department despite Pakistan previously having no approved supply chains under ESCAS. A month after leaving Fremantle, the sheep were unloaded at Port Qasim, Karachi. What followed turned into the subject of Sarah Ferguson's second *Four Corners* program on the trade, *Another Bloody Business*. Over the ten days or so after unloading, speculation mounted about the health status of the sheep and, for reasons still not well understood, Pakistani Authorities, backed up by armed police, took control and began a brutal cull. Thousands of sheep were clubbed or stabbed to death or simply buried alive in huge trenches in the feedlot where they were assembled. Within a few days up to half the sheep—10,000 animals—were dead. For a while, the killing stopped as court proceedings and diplomatic negotiations went on, but by the end of October all the remaining sheep had been killed.

It was argued by *Four Corners* that the cull would have been avoided had the exporter informed the Pakistani authorities of the Bahraini rejection. A subsequent Australian government investigation failed to examine the cause of the cull or to find the exporter responsible for the inhumane way the sheep were killed, concluding that *intervention by the Pakistan authorities and accompanying armed police was beyond the control of Wellard and could not have been avoided through the exercise of all due care*.

Despite being the single biggest live export incident since 2011, a 2015 departmental report on the performance of ESCAS failed to even state how many sheep had been killed, glossing over the incident with

these sterile words:

Following an incident where a consignment failed to unload [in Bahrain] in August 2012, Australian industry suspended trade. The consignment was redirected to Pakistan where the government assumed control of the consignment, with a very poor animal welfare outcome.

This pattern—of government investigations failing to hold exporters to account for actions that have led to cruel treatment of Australian animals—has been repeated many times since the introduction of ESCAS. Despite 90 complaints or reports of non-compliance listed on the Department of Agriculture website, across sixteen countries—Qatar, Kuwait, Mauritius, Israel, Malaysia, Egypt, Jordan, Gaza, the UAE, Vietnam, Indonesia, Oman, Turkey, the Philippines, Pakistan and Thailand—not one exporter has been prosecuted or restricted in their capacity to export more animals. The most common outcome is that some additional conditions are placed on future exports in an attempt to prevent a repeat of the incident, and a ‘non-compliance’ (minor, major or critical) is placed on the exporter’s record.

Since 2012, Animals Australia has conducted investigations and lodged 30 individual complaints with the Department of Agriculture across eleven countries. In the absence of any government inspection process, paradoxically it is now this organisation that plays the key role in appraising the compliance of exporters against ESCAS requirements. At the same time, the industry does everything it can to prevent Animals Australia’s investigators from gaining access to their facilities, thus the reports they are able to compile are likely only the tip of the iceberg. Ten of these complaints have documented the widespread and recurrent selling of Australian sheep outside of approved supply chains in Jordan and Kuwait. Each investigation reveals just how hard it is to trace these ‘lost’ animals back to their exporter when sheep are not required to be individually identified. Yet none of the conditions placed on non-compliant exporters have required electronic tagging of individual sheep. So the ‘losses’ from the system go on, and the same exporters continue to work in these markets unchecked. Either way, inside or outside the supply chain, sheep exported to the Middle East face a horrific journey and

slaughter without stunning.

But it is Animals Australia's investigations into the slaughter of Australian cattle in the Gaza Strip that highlight most clearly the complete impotence of the department in protecting exported livestock from cruelty. In November 2013, a series of videos posted on YouTube brought to light the hideous street slaughter of Australian cattle in Gaza during the Festival of Sacrifice. The subsequent government investigation was not completed until July 2014, by which time Animals Australia had lodged a formal complaint and written to the department four more times with further evidence of abuse. The department's report confirmed that *there was evidence of non-compliance with OIE animal welfare recommendations* at the one approved abattoir in Gaza and that nine cattle were missing from the supply chain (the only animals that could be traced by their tag numbers back to the exporter, Livestock Shipping Services (LSS)). The language of the report could not be less revealing: buried behind the words *evidence of non-compliance* is the reality that these young bulls (and many others) were subjected to terrifying, torturous ordeals and suffered horribly as they were killed. One video showed scenes so appalling that it was removed by YouTube as too shocking and disgusting to watch, even though the worst moments had already been blurred out. The question of how and why any exporter could have been granted approval to ship Australian animals into a conflict zone like the Gaza Strip, at a time when hostilities with Israel were developing into full-scale war remains unanswered. At the time of publication of this book the complaint lodged by Animals Australia in February 2014 was still listed on the department's website as an *investigation in progress*. The fate of the over 4,000 Australian cattle exported to Gaza in the interim does not bear contemplation. Animals Australia's intelligence suggested that ear tags were being routinely removed to avoid the identification of cattle by investigators. Despite assurances by government that LSS complied with all the additional conditions placed on them, it took some 14 months for the flow of Australian cattle from Israel to Gaza to cease.

The cruelty documented in Gaza and other countries has not held

back Minister Joyce from making some spectacularly extravagant claims about the trade, such as in March 2015 when he stated: *The recent report into Australia's live export assurance system demonstrated that Australian livestock exported overseas are treated humanely in almost every instance.* A few months later Joyce announced the signing of live export health protocols with China, opening up a market with the potential to out-compete Indonesia. This came only weeks after photographs emerged of the sledgehammer slaughter of Australian cattle sold outside the supply chain in Vietnam, yet the media reporting of the China deal barely mentioned animal welfare. Listening to reports about the expansion of the trade, it's frustrating how often live exports are discussed as if they were of an inanimate commodity like grain or iron ore. Why do journalists only raise questions about the treatment of animals when there is fresh exposure of cruelty, rather than pausing to ask what slaughter standards are like in China, or why it is that live cattle needed to be exported to a country that has no cultural need for 'hot meat' and is already such a huge buyer of Australian beef? They might also have asked whether the China trade will have a negative effect on meat processors, and therefore on jobs in Australia, since only southern cattle (outside the geographical zone where blue-tongue disease is a risk) are acceptable for export there.

This announcement was only the most recent of many trumpeting the success of the Coalition government in opening up new live export markets under its *Australia is open for business* banner. Joyce has reopened Bahrain and Egypt, and added Lebanon, Iran, Cambodia and Thailand to the list of potential markets since becoming minister, although actual exports to these countries are yet to register. His support for the trade is unequivocal, calling it *a real Australian success story*. The government's approach to issues like Gaza, as with any other inconvenient truths that threaten its open-for-business agenda, is one of 'move along, nothing to see here'—a strategy that glosses over the abuse of animals by framing the expansion of the trade as a positive exercise that acts to improve animal welfare standards in importing countries. Whatever limited improvements ESCAS has made to the treatment of our animals

overseas need to be seen in the context of its use as a propaganda tool to minimise outrage caused by the exposure of new atrocities.

The passing of time is of great advantage in any attempt to gain perspective on events, but the essential prerequisite is a willingness to see the evidence. Unfortunately it is a prevalent human failing that we often attempt to massage and reinvent reality to suit our sectional self-interest, a failing that successful societies minimise through fail-safe processes that encourage the evaluation of varied viewpoints and evidence. If *A Bloody Business* were broadcast for the first time now, would it have the same impact? It seems unlikely, and not just because we have a different government. The language and tactics used by the Coalition quickly evolved in opposition, as did that of the media, and also of Labor. Examining the response of the key Coalition spokespeople in the days, then years, after *A Bloody Business*, reveals an important aspect of this shift.

Initially, Tony Abbott was strangely silent (a telling fact in itself), but his deputy, Warren Truss, did make statements and give interviews. The morning after the program was aired, a statement from Truss read:

Images on Four Corners last night were abhorrent to every farmer and every Australian.

The Coalition supports Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig's call for immediate action to prevent Australian cattle being slaughtered in such appalling circumstances including bans of rogue facilities wherever possible.

The next day, when asked during an interview on ABC News 24 whether the Nationals supported the Labor government's ban on the first eleven abattoirs, he said:

I think that's an entirely appropriate response. The footage we saw on Four Corners was horrifying, disgusting and completely unacceptable. We cannot allow Australian animals to go to that kind of death.

To be fair to Truss, this was before the total ban and before its effect on producers either unfolded or was understood, developments that naturally helped harden the Coalition's attitude. Nonetheless, the shift in the view of the Coalition, evidenced by Abbott's declaration almost four years later that the ban was a *catastrophic decision*, raises very clear

and fundamentally important contradictions. As spokesperson for the opposition, Truss defined what was revealed by the ABC as abhorrent (and, to his credit, did not question the validity of the evidence). He declared the Coalition's support for bans of rogue facilities (without knowing or even qualifying how many there were until the next day) and he stated that our cattle could not be allowed to go to *that kind of death* (again without qualification). This initial response was a relatively genuine, unconstrained one.

Since then the Coalition has in numerous and various ways questioned the authenticity of the *Four Corners* footage, refused to accept evidence that slaughterhouses in Indonesia had or have widespread inhumane practices, and has actively facilitated the shipment of Australian animals into situations where *that kind of death* is clearly possible or even very likely. The Abbott government developed a general reputation for contradicting itself while insisting it hadn't. Following his deputy's initial concern about abhorrent cruelty, Abbott's change of rhetoric was an example of the evolution of political language to satisfy what seemed convenient at the time.

Similarly, following the backlash to the suspension, Labor has increasingly mimicked the government's line, apparently in fear of political damage from not being seen to support producers, a retreat caused by the Coalition's success in wedging its opponents. A reasoned assessment of the Gillard government's response to the 2011 crisis would reach the conclusion that while it was far too slow to recognise the problem, engage and react, the weight of evidence eventually forced it to do so. If the unprecedented public reaction to *Four Corners* played a major part in causing government action, it seems certain that the report from Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, received just before the suspension, provided the evidence that justified the minister's decision. This is a clear case of better late than never. But it seems that, publicly at least, accepting such an evaluation of what happened is perceived as being not in the interests of either major party.

The destructive role of wedging in Australian politics would make a compelling study in itself. Its part in closing down reasonable exploration

and discussion of issues plays a significant role in dumbing down public discourse. Furthermore, it has a pernicious influence in curtailing the ability of politicians to even begin to entertain whole areas of policy consideration and thereby limits positive outcomes for our society.

There is another damaging, closely linked problem evident in the processes of political manoeuvring in our democracy. In this case there is a prime example that we learnt about only relatively late in the writing of this book, so in a sense it is a continuing part of the ongoing story revealed throughout it. At a conference in mid-2015, I had a conversation with Simon Sheikh, the founder of GetUp, who had been instrumental in managing that organisation's effective support for the campaign following *A Bloody Business*. In order to show him how compelling the problem was, Animals Australia had given Sheikh an edited version of the Indonesian footage. He now told me that, believing the Gillard government deserved the opportunity to act, he had secretly offered to show it to the Prime Minister's office in the final weeks before its revelation on the ABC. A senior staff member came back to him declining the offer. The only reasonable assumption is that they did not want to know about information that might force the government to act. Here lies a serious fault-line in our democratic process, a flaw where engagement with serious issues is avoided wherever there is any threat of political damage.

As already examined, the decision to delay release of the footage was made because of the continued reluctance of successive governments to either engage with the issue or to act in any substantive way. My colleagues and I felt certain the Gillard government would only have shaken itself awake long enough to pass on the footage to industry, and then gone back into hibernation. For similar reasons, it seems clear the government declined Sheikh's offer and perhaps, as it sensed the maelstrom coming, was also starting to distance itself from industry. The implications in this reluctance to take on difficult issues (unless public pressure makes it unavoidable) are deeply disturbing. If a government's program is based only on reaction rather than long-term evaluation and intervention, any resulting developments will be skewed by the dangers

of short-term thinking at best, and gross opportunism at worst.

Abbott's criticism of the suspension was that it was a gross over-reaction, but in fact both parties have operated as if they were two sides of the same coin. The Labor government repeatedly held off controlling the trade until forced to act by an extreme animal welfare scandal; the Coalition government has aggressively chased trade opportunities, a process that seems unstoppable unless brought unstuck by extreme animal welfare scandals. Both governments should have seriously and dispassionately evaluated the evidence. A fascinating factor with the Abbott government, though, is how its opportunism was underpinned by strangely old-fashioned ideological obsessions. Hence their program to shut down all advisory bodies they saw as antagonistic to their aims, as though removing all opposition removes the basic problem (an aggressive form of sticking your head in the sand). As seen with the response to the first Hockey budget, this tactic runs the risk of a total collapse of credibility (followed by a reversal of rhetoric). Abbott gambled that forceful action backed by strong slogans, rather than balanced measures backed by consensus, would always carry the day. The consequence of this approach is now patently clear.

27. IN CONCLUSION

During the three-and-a-half years since this book's inception on the road back from Bermagui, the sad reality is that cruelty to Australian animals exported for slaughter has continued. Driving home on that winding coastal road our conversation followed analogous twists and turns as we discussed how my talk of the previous evening might be turned into a book-length analysis. It seemed to us that without a clearly explained account of the issue, with all its obscured evidence and hidden ramifications, the public was travelling in the dark, and thereby implicated in the trade without real consent. My usual workload made the prospect of the long slog of such a task very much less than attractive. But Julian was persuasive. He has a way of making light of difficulty and, by the time we climbed the escarpment towards Braidwood, I could see the outlines of a book taking shape. During the writing, the complexity of the issue and its ongoing sorry evolution have repeatedly validated my initial reluctance. But the task has also felt increasingly urgent.

Three-and-a-half years ago we did not expect the situation to have regressed. The backlash to the suspension of cattle exports to Indonesia and the concomitant shift in Australia's political direction has been such that the live export industry is once again ascendant. It's true that the trade now runs on new terms, but whether these have delivered anything other than very limited improvements to animal welfare is highly questionable. When the opening of new markets is taken into account, the situation can only be considered regressive. We've watched as, due to the ongoing persistence of Animals Australia's investigators, footage and reports of instances of inhumane treatment emerge with terrible regularity while, despite this gathering body of evidence, the media atmospherics have substantially changed for the worse. We listened, for instance to the ABC's Early AM in October 2015, as one of its three stories for the morning was a piece about growing optimism that yearly contracts will replace quarterly ones for live exports to Indonesia without any question or comment about animal welfare. In the same month we read in the rural press of the industry's excitement over the first air

consignment of slaughter-ready cattle to China, with no commentary on whether Chinese abattoirs routinely stun cattle, whether future exports would travel by plane (less than one per cent of cattle currently leave this way), or why live animals were being exported to a country that is already the third largest market for Australian beef. It is as though two parallel threads in the news exist in alienated isolation from each other.

It is true that the situation in Indonesia has changed since *A Bloody Business* went to air. There are some feedlots and slaughter houses in that country with standards similar to those in Australia, but they are still in the minority. And as the industry falls over itself to establish a reliable and consistent market there, its bargaining position to push for higher standards, even with the best will in the world, is weakened. If you really want something you tend to compromise to get it, particularly when there are local factors that inevitably act to sideline welfare concerns. Indonesia is a country with huge regional differences and with little history of animal welfare awareness. In recent times there have been complaints from some Muslim leaders about stunning, and there is pressure for greater penetration of the trade into provinces where standards and controls are very low. Back home, we have watched as the ongoing push into Indonesia continues to stunt the development of abattoirs in the north and maintains the dependence of producers there on the trade.

When we turn our attention from Indonesia where the voyage time is at least relatively short, to the Middle East, we see that little has changed. Stunning is still rejected by most countries. Cruelty exposed during the 2015 Festival of Sacrifice only underlined how persistent are the failures there—the same problems emerging year after year. Yet for some, the backlash to the 2011 suspension has cast such a long shadow that none of this registers properly. Back in December 2013, Heather Neil and I met with a Liberal MP from Western Australia to discuss the lack of government action over the horrific treatment of exported cattle in Gaza during the Festival. This was one of several such meetings that week and the conversations had been polite and predictable. As we

sat down and Heather began to talk about why we were there, our host stopped her mid-sentence. She said she knew all about the RSPCA and what it stood for and, looking straight at me and then Heather, told us we were responsible for the suicide of farmers who had been caught up in the aftermath of the 2011 suspension. She appeared utterly, aggressively convinced of this accusation. Heather tried to offer an informed explanation but there was little point.

What a complex question that accusation raises. Who is responsible for the decades of suffering caused by the trade and the disruption resulting from the Indonesia suspension? There is no doubt that my colleagues and I bear considerable responsibility for bringing the horrors of cattle slaughter into the living rooms of Australians on 31 May 2011 and thus for the events that followed. But should the animal welfare movement be blamed for going to the media and for the resultant suspension of the trade? Should we blame the public who rose up against the cruelty? Should we blame Minister Ludwig for failing to act earlier to improve the trade and so reduce the need for the suspension? Or should the public servants who failed to act after that first meeting with Professor Caple be held responsible? Or should responsibility be sheeted home to Caple and the others in the group that toured Indonesian abattoirs and failed to identify the flaws of the Mark 1 box? Or was it the fault of the committee back in Canberra who funded its development and installation? Perhaps it was the designer of the Mark 1 and the executives in the MLA and Livecorp who approved its construction who are culpable? Or the exporters and their representatives who signed the contracts to supply the Indonesians with Australian cattle? Or the producers who saw an opportunity and sold them their cattle? Or the government for continuing for decades to legitimise and facilitate the trade? Or the graziers who opened up marginal, seasonally productive lands? Or our forebears whose values failed to entrench animal welfare into farming practices? Or, indeed, us all for tolerating or overlooking a system that has for decades sold our animals into inhumane treatment that we do not countenance at home?

Surely any fair-minded observer would see how responsibility for

the situation has compounded through neglect and inaction for many decades, while being driven by rapacious economic interests. After years of observation and through the writing of this book, our view is that development occurring without proper ethical oversight is the root cause of the problem. Since 2011, proponents of the trade have increasingly characterised themselves as agents of change, attempting to justify themselves by claiming they are improving animal welfare in our export markets. A more accurate characterisation would see them as economic rationalists, maintaining that live exports improve the national balance sheet and offer producers better returns. This simple equation is justified by the assertion that in an economically unstable world, the standard of living in this country will suffer unless every available opportunity is pursued. It is only when more searchingly complex questions are asked that the limitations of this view begin to become apparent.

However willing the Australian people may be to make such an evaluation they have been seriously hampered from doing so. While many public policy issues challenge easy comprehension, even basic scrutiny of this industry is all but impossible. Because of the work of animal welfare organisations, we may now know something of the treatment of our cattle in overseas markets. At the same time, however, industry and political spin repeatedly insist that any instance of mistreatment is isolated, and the vast majority of animals experience good welfare. For example, in a statement in early 2015 that ludicrously suggests the fate of these animals is beneficial to them, Minister Joyce said that *more than 99 per cent of livestock exported have experienced a positive welfare outcome*. This is all too reminiscent of the assertion in the Caple report that the welfare of cattle in Indonesia was *generally good*. It is equally of concern that few Australians understand how closed to external examination are the facilities in our own country where these animals are being assembled, loaded and unloaded for export, or how stressful the long trucking trips to get them there, or how inadequate the conditions are on the ships that carry them overseas. Apart from the revelations made by welfare organisations, none of us can access much evidence of how the trade is being conducted overall. So, as footage of cruelty leaks

out, as it almost inevitably does, a large part of the public is shocked and dismayed by what we have allowed to occur.

For these reasons, it is our contention that the conflict of values referred to in the title of this book has also come about largely by default. Our conclusion is that the live export trade began and has developed in an ethical vacuum. Because the early decades of this process went almost completely unexamined, the trade assumed a degree of structural importance in our economy that has made any re-evaluation of its acceptability hotly contested. As a nation, being collectively 'asleep at the wheel' through many decades has been understandable exactly because this business's serious failings are conducted so far from view. Even many of the farmers who produce exported animals have in the past been unaware of the extent of the suffering of their livestock. While they can be accused of failing to ask enough questions for fear of what they might learn, few of them can have expected the extent of the carnage revealed in 2011. In this relative absence of knowledge, with a financial premium to be made by an industry with an unpredictable income stream, such export opportunities were too enticing. Then, as public awareness of the cruelty of the trade has grown, opposition to it has been met by an inevitably powerful defence of long-established practices.

But was this process really as inevitable as it might seem? The way in which the sheep industry responded to the 2004 campaign against mulesing by the US-based animal rights group PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) offers a valuable comparison. No one involved trivialises the issue of the pain caused by mulesing, a procedure that involves cutting large folds of skin from the breech area of merino lambs to reduce the risk of flystrike. Mulesing is seen as the lesser of two evils: the pain of the procedure versus the suffering caused by flystrike. It is widely acknowledged, including by sheep producers themselves, that there is a need for a more humane alternative. In response to PETA's market-based campaign, the industry invested in a targeted research and development program for alternatives and set itself the goal of ending the practice by 2010. In the end this deadline proved too ambitious, but some progress has been made and removing the need for

mulesing remains the wool industry's long-term objective. A proportion of farmers are now breeding wrinkle-free sheep and marketing their wool as unmulesed—in 2015 this made up eight per cent of total wool production. Pain relief (unavailable in 2004) was used on nearly 60 per cent of the 14 million lambs that were mulesed in 2014. (Sadly though, there are still far too many farmers who are unwilling to pay the additional cost of pain relief and whose lambs suffer as a result.) Provided there is continuing progress in developing alternative strategies, the ongoing use of mulesing will likely be tolerated for some time to come. But there is a limit to this tolerance. Animal welfare organisations must continue to apply pressure for the wool industry to avoid slipping into complacency. The point is that both wool producers and animal welfare organisations have the same objective—that mulesing should end—the only difference is how quickly each thinks that goal can be reached.

In comparison, there is already a clear, demonstrated and successful alternative to the live export of animals. In fact, as we have seen, meat export is successfully established as by far our dominant means of supplying overseas markets. There is also a widespread view that the compromises involved in the live trade are too great and cause too much suffering. And yet there is powerful resistance to making a full change to the more humane alternative, even though the justification for continuing, and indeed expanding, the trade is only economic, while with mulesing there is also an animal welfare argument in its favour when the risk of flystrike is considered.

It is as though the one-dimensional justification for continuing the trade has caused its defence to be more intransigent. Live export has become a totemic issue for those involved—something that far outweighs its economic significance. It has become a symbol of the rights of 'Aussie farmers' when in fact only a tiny minority rely on the trade for their main income. Sometimes an essentially weak position can only compensate and cover its failings through sustained manipulation and belligerence—hence the fact that this issue has always been highly politicised. When any new regulation has looked like being imposed, including improvements to on-board standards or the development of ESCAS, industry

has invariably applied pressure to have such changes stopped or watered down. Even when producers have backed reforms, such as mandatory stunning as part of ESCAS controls, exporters have still opposed them as an unnecessary restriction of market opportunities.

An example like the working consensus on ending mulesing helps throw into perspective the expansion of live exports. But while it is reasonable to blame the export industry for its cruelty, Australians also have to ask ourselves why we, at a societal level, have allowed this industry to continue even as our understanding of it has begun to grow. It is, in itself, a sad reflection on us as a people that the trade is such an intractable political issue. As an affluent, advanced, stable country we should be able to integrate commerce and ethics relatively seamlessly. Of course it is in our interest to bring these aspects of decision-making together, but it is also unacceptable to avoid doing so—the scale of the problem alone should make us face it when more than three million cattle and sheep are exported every year. This movement by Australia of livestock is almost certainly the largest planned mass transport of animals in human history. Is this really an achievement we want to continue to own?

It is an odd but usually harmless aspect of Australian culture that we like to build big things and then claim with pride that they are bigger than anywhere else. It should be a matter of profound regret that here too, with this vast movement of living creatures, we are the biggest. The immense cost to these animals shipped and slaughtered, month after month, year after year, and to our reputation as a humane and advanced society, reaps what is overall a relatively small economic benefit. As has been shown, despite the scale of these shipments, they make up a small proportion of the export income we derive from animal production.

When Prime Minister Tony Abbott asserted that the previous Labor government's suspension of the live exports to Indonesia was, firstly, a panicked reaction and, later, a catastrophic decision, he neatly highlighted the problem of political positioning around animal welfare. It may be true that the Gillard government was overwhelmed by the enormous public outcry following *A Bloody Business*, but at least it then put in place a system that tried to prevent some of the inherent problems

in importing countries from continuing. We will never know how an Abbott, or indeed a Turnbull, government might have dealt with that outcry. Certainly, the Liberal and National parties in opposition were quick to identify themselves with their natural constituency among agricultural producers and the rural press. The major parties attempt to satisfy the demands of somewhat different constituencies, but both appear wedded to furthering the trade. Anything that might conceivably limit economic advantage is often portrayed as extremist. The excuse that red tape harms efficiency is rolled out as though it trumps every other concern. In fact, regulation is increased when it serves the purposes of government and industry, protecting certain commercial interests or constituencies where it is politically expedient, such as with Senator Back's attempt to introduce 'animal protection' legislation that would in effect limit the ability of animal activists to film animal cruelty.

Expecting consistency from our political processes may be naïve, but sometimes the contradictions are so basic they are difficult to comprehend. A statement on the Department of Agriculture website reveals how inured to such contradictions our officials can become: *The Australian Government does not tolerate cruelty towards animals and will not compromise on animal welfare standards. Our ongoing involvement in the live export trade provides an opportunity to influence animal welfare conditions in importing countries.* It can only be asked, if conditions in these countries require improvement, how it is that we can send our animals there without compromise?

The contradictions prove to be endemic when successive federal governments have spent taxpayers' money to subsidise infrastructure and support training programs in other countries when the same governments have refused financial support for the building of new abattoirs in Australia. At the same time they have chosen not to require exporters to meet a higher standard, for example by mandating stunning, the individual identification of sheep, or reducing stocking densities on-board ship, which is, in effect, subsidising live exports in competition with meat, at the cost of poor animal welfare. They are also favouring one group of farmers, who supply the trade, over those who do not. Again,

our values are distorted by a bottom line that promotes some business models over others, with arbitrary methods of evaluation. The irony only deepens when one considers the withdrawal of subsidies for, and subsequent closure of, the car industry and other manufacturing and value-adding businesses on the grounds they are economically uncompetitive. Farming may have a claim to government support but, when similar intervention is being withdrawn in other comparable sectors of the economy, it is reasonable to ask whether there is any kind of systematic planning or rationale behind these actions.

As evidenced throughout this book, governments also simply refuse to listen to what they prefer not to hear. The Abbott government's shutting down of all the committees that provided advice on animal welfare, as well as its disbanding of the relevant section of the Department of Agriculture, provides proof of this selective deafness. Added to this is the inherent conflict of interest in a department charged with looking after both the promotion of the trade and its regulation. For decades, the role that has dominated is promotion, except during short-term responses to crises. As already argued here, what is needed is an independent instrumentality to oversee and reconcile competing interests within its responsibilities. It is only by this means that a credible balance between economics and ethics can be established in policy advice and development. Having an independent arbiter is particularly important when there is such a failure of consensus as exists over this issue, and where political lobbying and pressure are so evident.

There is another less transparent and more insidious aspect of governments preferring not to know. It has become a reflexive political ploy to ignore issues that don't have to be faced. In other words, all politics thus become reactive politics. There has long been dismayed public commentary about the short-termism of Australian politics, and a built-in avoidance of complex issues is at the heart of the problem. The refusal by Prime Minister Gillard's office of Simon Sheikh's offer to view the Indonesian footage appears to follow the unfortunate political maxim that what you don't know can't hurt you. It should be a clear expectation that any government, with its broad resources, should be able to engage

with all the vital issues that affect its people (and their animals) no matter how politically tricky those issues might appear to be. Governments have a clear responsibility to lead the analysis in such matters and, if nothing else, recent events in federal politics have shown just how much voters want their representatives to articulate that analysis. The tendency of politicians waiting to see where the wind blows on difficult issues is another strong cause of voter disillusionment.

The unfortunate reality is that, in the formation of policy, there is a political bias that animal welfare is expendable, if not an impediment to economic progress. It seems that while politicians now understand that public awareness of farm animal welfare issues has evolved to a level that demands their attention, for most this only translates to lip service, and only so far as it does not affect trade. Economics will always be central to political discourse, with the argy-bargy about deficit, investment and export levels remaining a perennial battleground—of course, successful trade is fundamental to our standard of living. Our challenge is to succeed economically while developing practices that fully address animal welfare, environmental and humanitarian issues. Astute leadership would perceive the benefits of high standards in these areas and promote them vigorously. It is a serious misalignment of national priorities that we are hurrying in the opposite direction in the mistaken belief that trade should be pushed as an unquestionable ‘good’, regardless of its standards.

An awareness of animal welfare can no longer be dismissed as a fringe concern of middle-class city dwellers. That the two dominant supermarket chains are implementing broad animal welfare standards across their buying policy is indicative of this change. A number of fast food chains are moving in the same direction. These mainstream areas of commerce have recognised that change is essential to their success because their market research tells them that after price and quality, animal welfare is the biggest factor affecting their customers’ choice. That government resists this shift in perception makes it all too clear that it will take concerted, persistent pressure from the public to sway it. The live export industry may understand this shift in perception, as the efforts of its

public relations machine proves, but unlike the supermarkets and fast food chains, their customer is not Australian. No matter how many of us reject the trade, we have no ability to influence it through our choices as consumers. Producers, on the other hand, out of concern for their animals and seeing the shift in consumer sentiment, can choose not to send their animals to live export, as some already have.

A telling point about the live export industry is not just that it has failed to meet the expectations of animal welfare organisations but that it has not even met its own standards, in all their inadequacy, with anything like consistency. The extreme cruelty repeatedly revealed by the evidence of Animals Australia's investigators is symptomatic not of isolated excesses but of intrinsic flaws in both the systems used to slaughter animals in other countries, and the values of those who ply the trade. Claims that the industry is proving its good intentions since the suspension by its implementation of ESCAS ring hollow when the results are at very best patchy and deeply undermined by the scale of the problem in countries beyond our real influence, let alone control. Excuses are constantly made that newly implemented systems are now adequate, only for them to be proved wrong. Each time a new regulatory reform is introduced we are told it will solve the problem. ESCAS was supposed to resolve issues in importing countries, but key flaws undermine its standards and its processes for auditing, reporting and investigation. The attempt by industry to take back control of the regulatory system through its proposed *Global Assurance Program*, replacing the need for ESCAS auditing, is the latest iteration of such manipulation. In the end, whatever control system is in place, exporters are being trusted by government to implement it in countries beyond our jurisdiction, and this despite the long history of serious failures by this industry to protect animals. The analogy of the fox guarding the chicken coop comes insistently to mind.

This book has articulated a long list of known factors our society wrestles with regarding this issue, but there are further factors that are likely to compound the problem in the future. As we determine economic policy, there are other debts that may become unavoidable in

our commercial decisions, among them our debt to the environment. The raising of livestock is under increasing scrutiny for the extent of its effect on greenhouse gases, as well as the resources required to grow animals. It seems inevitable that people will go on eating meat, but its proportion in the average diet will have to lessen as the cost of its production becomes increasingly unsustainable. In that case, the ethics of animal husbandry and meat consumption will not be only about animal welfare but increasingly about environmental damage, with consequent effects on what we decide to grow. Some parts of Australia that are farmed now are already so marginal that their land use is questionable, but with current projections for climate change, the definition of arable land may change radically. Aside from any practicalities, surely it is in our interests to develop sustainable agricultural practices with such high standards that our reputation makes us the supplier of choice in a changing, unstable world. Acting of our own volition may well help us avoid being forced to face uncomfortable realities, and in fact give us a competitive advantage. Many of these decisions may prove very difficult, or impossible, but it is our contention that, regardless of any risk of future crises, the pain we cause animals now simply has to be dealt with.

As we have seen, there are arguments that are mounted in defence of live exports. The issue we need to confront, though, is that the benefits derived from the trade cannot justify its inherent cruelty. It may be possible to humanely fly an animal to another country with equivalent animal welfare standards and legislation as Australia's, but this will never be economically sustainable on the scale of our current trade. This is not an abstract problem. Every year more than three million Australian animals are transported to, and killed in, foreign countries. Most of them are forced to endure lengthy sea journeys in crowded and uncomfortable conditions. Only a small proportion of them are slaughtered in a way that we regard as humane in Australia. When it suits our purposes we regularly abandon these animals to a fate not acceptable for livestock here. The central argument of this book is that this is not a situation that our society should tolerate. To do so is unconscionable when, with good

planning, producers can adjust to a meat-only trade.

The full extent of the challenge to end live exports for slaughter is starkly proved by re-examining past efforts. As already documented, the extensive, well-reasoned 1985 Senate Select Committee report on the live sheep trade concluded that, if it were evaluated on animal welfare terms alone, the trade should be shut down. The report was, at least in part, instigated by another intense public outcry, then over the sinking of the *Farid Fares* with the death of 40,605 sheep. Despite the report, industry, backed by the Department of Agriculture and successive governments, was able to minimise or block demands for significant policy change. It is hardly surprising, then, that even the unprecedented response to the cruelty revealed in *A Bloody Business* has been swamped by industry lobbying. This is the pattern that holds deep sway in our society and, by almost inevitable extension, over the present government. The mantra *open for business*, was indicative of the trade-at-all-costs ideology of the Abbott administration. Whether Malcolm Turnbull has any appetite for a more balanced approach has yet to be revealed, but the signs are not good given that there has been no change of minister. The relevant comparison here is that New Zealand, with an economy highly dependent on farm exports and run by another conservative government, considers its reputation too important to allow live exports for slaughter. Our own meat processing sector has argued that live exports damage the overall meat export trade. The weight of international scientific opinion is firmly against the live trade. The fact that no animal welfare organisation in the world supports it is indicative of how far we risk making ourselves a pariah by continuing it.

While it can be reasonably argued that political conservatism may protect us from the transitory whims of public opinion, it also acts as a damaging retardant to necessary reform. Vested interests are frequently resistant to change, but a healthy society limits their power. Such interests sometimes also seek to undermine established institutions when it suits them politically, as evidenced in recent assaults by federal and state governments on the independence of the judiciary. While one of the most enduring catch-cries of public discourse is the importance of

our democratic institutions, our political parties are too often beholden to interest groups instead of genuinely evaluating the public interest. Responding to public debate, and properly evaluating that discourse, is fundamental to democracy, while paying off political debts corrupts it. If the public doesn't demand better, it gets government controlled by financial muscle. The fickle nature of media attention to long-term issues, and its generally conservative bias, also makes direct appeal to the public a necessity for the animal welfare movement. That campaigning for public support is a prerequisite of RSPCA strategy is even more apparent when this political situation and a long view of the history of live exports are considered. As with many social issues, our politicians have yet to understand what is really in the interests of the animals and the public, as well as the producers themselves. Unfortunately, nothing is likely to change until government accepts that the majority of ordinary Australians reject the trade.

However galling it might be for those of us who oppose it, ultimately *A Bloody Business* has done nothing to limit the scale of this trade. Looking back to those intense weeks in May 2011 this seems an extraordinary result. For decades, the industry argued that their survival would be threatened by implementing the sort of closed system urged for by animal welfare organisations. After the crisis of 2011, many in the industry suddenly viewed this type of system as their lifeline. Certainly, it has not stemmed the flow of cattle to Southeast Asia and beyond: in 2015 alone, 1.3 million cattle were exported from Australia. High prices typical of the boom and bust pattern of this industry even lured some southern producers into selling their animals to the live trade, subjecting them to its attendant risks, rather than sending them to processors here. Even so, these high prices, caused by an increased global demand for meat, offer an economic incentive for a move to meat-only exports, if only the decision were made.

As always, the power of economics frames what is possible in society, but ultimately that economic framework has to take into account the values of its people. The huge outpouring of emails, letters and phone calls that followed *A Bloody Business* was indicative of our unwillingness

as a society to tolerate entrenched cruelty. In response, the industry has done everything in its power to establish the impression that it is a positive agent for change for animal welfare. It's as though we are back in 2011 when, until *A Bloody Business*, exporters were trading on the slogan *live export cares*. With increasing bravado, they are again claiming a social licence for their enterprise. We are not persuaded. Neither do we believe, nor do most people who do not have a vested interest in this business, that there is any convincing argument to prevent a planned transition away from live exports.

What is also very clear to us is that there is no excuse for the inhumane treatment of the animals we use for our own benefit. That one day in the near future, whoever is in government will reach these same conclusions, is our determined hope. Then we may well look back, as is often the way with social evolution, and ask why it took so long for such a starkly obvious and compelling understanding to be reached.

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